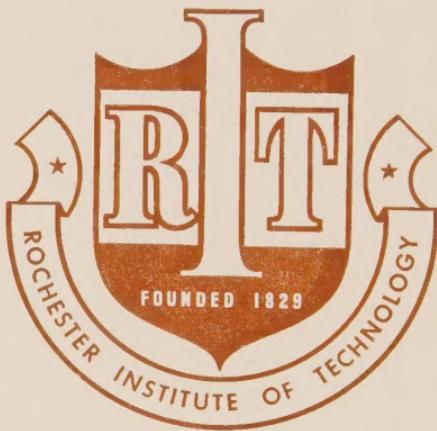




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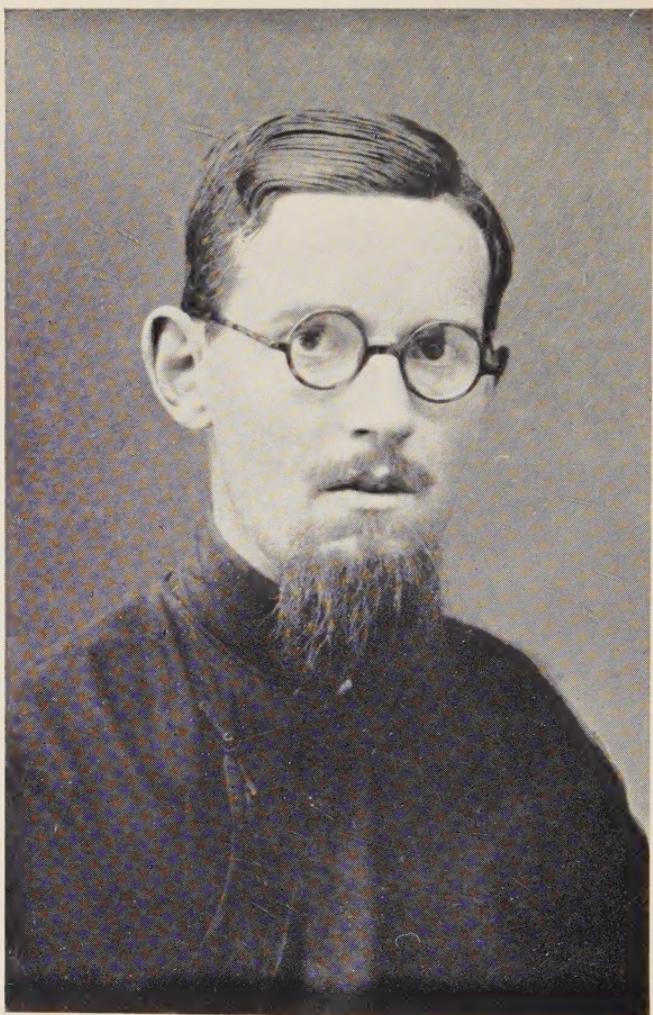
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IN THE LAND OF MAO TSE-TUNG









THE AUTHOR

# IN THE LAND OF MAO TSE-TUNG

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*Father Carlo Suigo*

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN  
BY MURIEL CURREY  
AND EDITED  
BY CLIFFORD WITTING



*George Allen & Unwin Ltd*  
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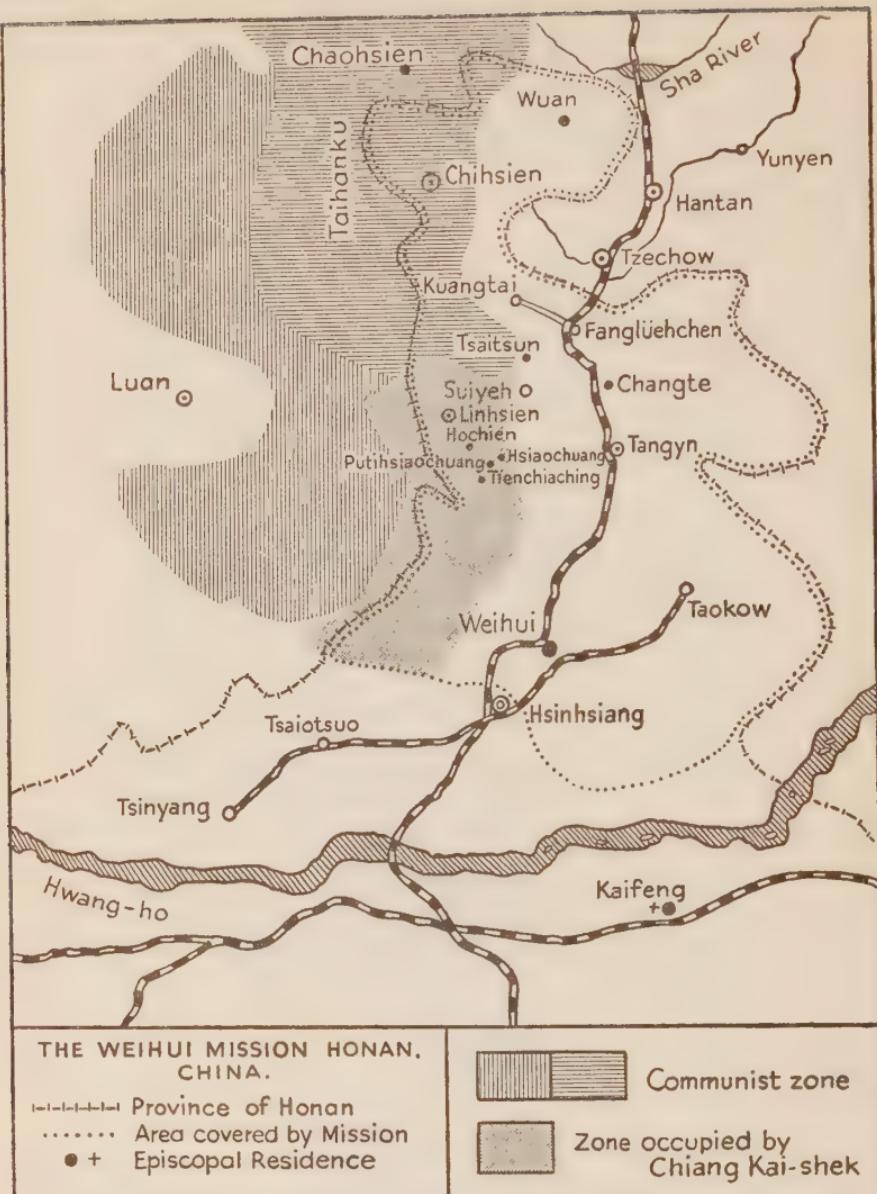
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*To My Dear Mother*

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## FOREWORD

WHEN very young, Carlo Suigo entered the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions of Milan. As soon as he had finished his studies, and a month after he had celebrated his first Mass, he was sent to China, where he arrived in 1938, when the war with Japan was at its height. Having perfected his Chinese at the Regional House at Kaifeng, he was sent to the Mission at Weihui, in the province of Honan.

There began his apostolate and his sufferings among the Japanese, brigands, Communists and Nationalists in that enormous boiling cauldron of political intrigues and bloody revenge.

On the 29th June 1945, he was captured at Suiyeh by the Red Army of Mao Tse-tung and, after a first failure, succeeded in escaping on the 28th January 1946.

Repatriated to Italy, he tells in this book, in which he never sacrifices truth to preconceptions, all that he saw personally of the vast area of Asia controlled by Moscow.

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## PROLOGUE

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It is desirable to prelude this narrative of personal experiences in China during the second half of 1945 and the first few weeks of 1946 with a brief description of that country's sad history over the last generation, with some references to the principal actors in the drama.

The ten years from 1927 to 1937 were, for China, a period of revolution, wars and disasters of every kind. In great centres like Hankow and Shanghai, in the smallest villages, disorder and confusion fell on the people with all the fury of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Great armies, caring nothing for the country, swept across it, destroying and ruining whole regions. The population, decimated by hunger, by poverty, by continual and deadly attacks, fell innocent victims under the flails of anarchy and tyranny.

In this great land, stained with blood and crimes, the brigand chiefs came and went with bewildering rapidity, seeking the limelight in their desperate efforts to be recognized as professional soldiers and absorbed into the regular forces. The generals, too, flung themselves into the maelstrom: Wu Pei-fu, Fen Yü-hsiang, Chang Tso-lin, Yen Hsi-shan, Mao Tse-tung, Chiang Kai-shek, and others—all fighting for control of the government. It was the struggle of the south against the north.

Two parties emerged from the bitter and confused conflict: the Kuomintang,<sup>1</sup> headed by Chiang Kai-shek, and the party under the leadership of Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh, the first a politician, the second a soldier. In 1923, while still young men, Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh had become members of the Kuomintang, in which they represented the extreme left of the party. They were joined in the struggle against the Kuomintang by the 'brilliant and aristocratic' Chou En-lai.

In 1927 Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist army moved north, while

<sup>1</sup> 'The People's Party,' founded by Sun Yat-sen in 1894 as the *Hsing Chung Hui*, 'The China Regeneration Society,' and renamed in 1912. It was based on three principles: nationalism, democracy, and better living standards. On Sun Yat-sen's death in 1925, Chiang Kai-shek became its leader.

Mao Tse-tung, who had as his adviser the Russian, Blüchner, tried to form a Communist government, but failed. Meanwhile Chiang Kai-shek, after a series of victories, reached Nanking and established his government there. From that moment the history of China entered on a new phase and the people enjoyed peace—a peace that lasted but a very short time.

Chiang Kai-shek rejected Communism and, as a prudent and wise man, determined to protect the family, private property and religion. It was a change quite unexpected by the Communists, who scornfully withdrew to the province of Kiangsi, and once again tried to organize the 'Soviet Government of China' and the Red Army.

But Chiang Kai-shek's party grew to vast proportions. The Communists, repeatedly defeated in desperate battles, had to retire, and Mao Tse-tung transferred his government to Yenan in north Shensi, on the borders of Mongolia, close to the Russian frontier. In their retreat the Communists had to cross the whole of China from south-east to north-east. The centre of this country was occupied by the Nationalists, so they had to turn first west as far as Yunnan, north across the province of Szechwan, and then east to Shensi. This epic march cost the Communists enormous losses.

The great mountain range running northward from the Hwang-ho (Yellow River), which divides the provinces of Honan and Shensi, forms the so-called region of Taihanku. The railway from Hankow to Peking skirts this range for almost its whole length.

The traveller from the north crosses a very fertile plain, and is at once struck by the strange shapes of these fantastic mountains—now heaps of cinders, now the green of vegetation, now sudden contorted heights telling of their volcanic origin. Here and there the summits of great walls of rock quiver in the first rays of the sun, with all the colours of the rainbow from dark blue to orange and pale yellow, recalling the Dolomites of northern Italy. There are enchanting valleys where nature seems determined to show herself at her most beautiful: the famous springs of Ma-tsiao, where the equally famous General Fen Yü-hsiang spent some time; the springs of Hopei-tsi and Suiyeh. From the train, one sees rising here and there on the tops of the little hills great dark masses—forests of century-old fir trees. The names of the villages betray their origin, the ancient burial places of princes: Kanwangfen, the tomb of King Kan; Hochiafen, the burial place of the Ho family. But the beauty of the countryside is matched by the riches that lie underground: iron, coal, silver and other minerals. A

most interesting region, this lost corner of China, where the surviving Communists took refuge. The natural riches of the soil and the ease with which they could either resist or disappear into the recesses of the mountains in the event of attack provided them with the means of concealment and, at the same time, the opportunity to lead a more or less comfortable existence.

In 1936 Chiang Kai-shek, having established his government at Nanking, decided to exterminate the Reds. He sent General Chang Tso-lin to Tsinan with orders to march on Yenan and force the Communists to surrender. Chang Tso-lin betrayed Chiang Kai-shek and suspended hostilities against the Reds. Chiang Kai-shek then decided to take command himself, but he was captured in the December of that year and sent as a prisoner to Mao Tse-tung. But a message from Moscow compelled the Communists to release him, and they were instructed to await further orders.

When in 1937 the war with Japan broke out, the new danger forced the Nationalists and Communists to conclude a truce. At Chungking, Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Tse-tung shook hands, the Red Army of Yenan was recognized as part of the regular forces and baptized with the name it still bears: *Pa Lu Chün*, the 8th Army.<sup>1</sup> Under this title it was sent to the front.

In a very short time the Japanese were in possession of the eastern provinces, even the capital, Nanking, falling into their hands, and the government had to be transferred to distant Chungking. In the provinces occupied by the Japanese, the *Pa Lu Chün* fought for seven years, a million soldiers advancing from Yenan towards Shensi, Hupei, Honan and Shantung. It was a defensive war, and they never forgot their principal aim—the Bolshevization of the country. In 1939 the Communist tactics were extremely effective, their advance coinciding with that of the Japanese. From the first the chief objectives of the invaders were the railways, the great centres of communication and the towns, while the Communists sought to occupy the countryside. Once again the people found themselves the shuttlecock between two tyrannies, both determined to enforce their will at any cost.

That year, 1939, our district became a devil's chess-board on which, like terrible phantoms, the Japanese, the Communists, marauders, brigands and Nationalist spies played a game with death as the stakes—a game that was to last till the final disaster: the surrender of the

<sup>1</sup> Literally 8th Route Army. *Lu* (Route) is applied to a body of troops with a somewhat roving commission.

Japanese in 1945, followed by the victory of the Communists over the army of Chiang Kai-shek.

After the Japanese conquest of Suiyeh, the Communists who had taken refuge in the mountains of Taihanku suddenly sprang to life. Their small numbers increased rapidly and they soon had an army that swept through the villages like hungry wolves. To the Communists were added the Nationalist guerilla bands, which, after being demobilized, organized themselves into formidable nuclei of resistance.

This state of affairs was far more terrible for the people than for the conquerors from the east. The towns under the direct control of the Japanese enjoyed comparative quiet, but the countryside was the scene of raids that wiped out the inhabitants. At first, in order to make themselves popular with the people, the Japanese contented themselves with what amounted to peaceful penetration. They tried to appear as kind as possible; they set up civil authorities, made roads, interested themselves in the needs of the people, and sometimes even helped them. But this effort at conquest by kindness was very quickly destroyed by the action of the Communists. In every village the shadow of the Japanese terror became a nightmare, a mass of granite from which the tide retreated in terror. But when, towards evening, the Japanese returned to the city, the village once again fell into the hands of the Communists. Those guilty of collaborating with the enemy (it was very easy to find such an excuse) were liquidated, as were also even those who had not been able to fly before the arrival of the Japanese and, to save their own skins, had been compelled to offer them hospitality. The Japanese forced the people to make roads during the day; the Communists forced them to destroy the roads during the night. Every district had two heads, one appointed by the Japanese, the other by the Communists. The flag of the rising sun and the flag of the hammer and sickle were drawing ever closer together. The same thing was happening in the districts controlled by the Nationalists.

When these felt themselves sufficiently strong they initiated a counter-offensive to stem the flood of active Communist propaganda. The Reds, for their part, did not intend to allow themselves to be overwhelmed by 'an army of traitors who had retreated before the enemy,' so by night (not by day for fear of the Japanese) there were fierce encounters, and those who suffered were the unfortunate villagers. Besides enduring innumerable and indescribable crimes, thefts and depredations, they had to pretend to welcome the soldiers who called themselves 'the saviours of our country.'

The situation became even more tragic when, in the autumn of 1939, the Nationalists tried to reconquer Suiyeh. This second disaster was worse than the first. It was inevitable that the Communists would profit by it and enlarge their field of action. More cunning and less reckless than the Nationalists, they contented themselves with ambushing the parties of fifteen or twenty Japanese who visited the villages every day. At first these tactics succeeded; trusting too much to their own courage and despising the cowardly Chinese, the little parchment-faced overlords advanced into the mountains in the mistaken belief that they were fighting an enemy who would resist their advance. The battle never went as they had planned it. The Reds, who knew the ground perfectly, sowed mines at the entrances to the villages, in the ruins of a pagoda, in a demolished village, on the bridges or on the only paths, then retreated to safe positions, fired a volley and disappeared. In a short time the number of those killed in these attacks increased so much that the Japanese began to lose their nerve.

Encouraged by their success, the Communists began to invade the villages near Suiyeh, reaching even the walls of the town itself. From my house, situated on the extreme edge of the built-up area, with the open country on two sides, I had to listen every night to bursts of firing. When the guerillas from the mountains chose the wall of my house as their rendezvous, I had to say good-bye to sleep, and to worry not so much about my own safety as that of the pupils and staff, and about the intentions of the attackers and defenders. Like a wandering shadow, accompanied by a faithful Mongol dog, I would go from one courtyard to another, forcing myself to do my best to encourage both children and adults. Fortunately man is an animal that soon becomes accustomed to danger, and learns to sleep even through rifle-fire.

Within and without, there seemed to be, as it were, a curtain of merciful ignorance, but this was torn aside by the first light of morning, when the tragic happenings of the night were revealed—houses unroofed or destroyed, more ruins, more dead bodies. All this frayed the nerves of the Japanese, who, realizing the dangers they had to face, hastily took counter-measures. They organized a group of well-paid collaborators to spy on the movements of the Communists and, if possible, to discover their hiding-place. Some Japanese who knew the language, the habits and the customs of the Chinese very well were added to the squad, and nobody could recount all the injustices and crimes they committed. The Japanese prisons were overflowing with

unfortunate people, mostly innocent, who had to pay with torture and death for their inability to buy their freedom. Those who succeeded in escaping lived like hunted men.

The Japanese had not troops enough to garrison every village, so they organized small local commands composed of ex-Nationalists, brigands and mercenaries, whose numbers increased every day. These men formed the army of the new Japanese-controlled government of Wang Ching-wei, a Chinese politician chosen by the Japanese for that post. In a short time they became the most ruthless oppressors of the local populations. In addition, all the heads of the villages were forced to report to the commandant of the town every day all the happenings in their villages. All these defensive precautions were of very little use. The Reds continued their work of disintegration and terrorism, the means of communication being their chief objectives. Bands of men were enrolled in each village, and every night they had to destroy a bridge, blow up the railway, or bury mines along a certain stretch of main road.

To deal with these new Communist tactics, the Japanese adopted new measures. They ordered the people to build small forts, five *li*<sup>1</sup> apart, along the railway line and the roads, which were patrolled by two or three Japanese soldiers and about twenty Chinese auxiliaries. Everyone was stopped and carefully searched, suspicious characters and those without proper identification papers being imprisoned.

The Communists retired to the mountains until fresh orders came to attack and destroy the forts. The Japanese immediately increased their espionage and succeeded in discovering the Communist refuge. One morning three Japanese columns surrounded the Chaohsien mountains to the north-west of our district of Chihsien. The attack was so unexpected that the Communists found themselves trapped; flight was impossible. In the booty captured was even a machine for making *cash*, Chinese coins of small denomination.

Even this misfortune did not weaken the morale of the followers of Mao Tse-tung, and very soon they renewed the struggle with even grimmer determination. This Communist recrudescence coincided with a Nationalist spurt of energy. The 40th Army and the new 5th Army, both reorganized for the *n*th time and now commanded by Generals Pang Ping-hsun and Sun Tien-ying, advanced to the attack.

Again the Japanese had to devise defensive measures. They forced the people to dig an immense ditch, 12 feet wide and 10 feet deep

<sup>1</sup> A *li* is rather over one-third of a mile, varying in different localities.

which ran from Peking over mountains and plains as far as the Yellow River. A second trench was dug by the people beside the Peking-Hankow railway, and others round the little forts, while the country was patrolled every day by ill-behaved and undisciplined Japanese soldiers. During my visits to the villages I often saw savage doings, the people seeming stupefied by the unceasing, unexpected appearances of armed men. The scenes I witnessed will never be effaced from my memory. I do not know how to explain the situation except by likening the Chinese people to a fruit tree that all wicked boys and worthless scoundrels could approach with impunity to pluck the fruit, to break the branches and to destroy.

The Japanese and their collaborators had not overrun the whole country. The Communists swept over it, triumphant and menacing. When they left, it was the turn of the Nationalists, who came to collect taxes, straw and forage for the animals, and sometimes to press men capable of fighting into assisting them in an attack on one of the small forts. Anything of value they immediately stole. The women, terrified and trembling, hid themselves in the most distant parts of the houses, while the men, between blows, kicks and flogging, streaming with sweat and blood, tried to please one and ingratiate themselves with the other. The headmen of many villages, not able to bear the misery, committed suicide.

It was ironical that in our district the most peaceful area was that occupied by the brigands. Having collaborated with the Japanese from the beginning, they had succeeded in gaining their goodwill, or at least a certain amount of toleration, and had almost complete control over the regions where they had established themselves. They were all on the most friendly terms with the Catholic Church, and whenever we could we missionaries exhorted them to treat the people well. The taxes they levied were heavy, but the people paid willingly and tried to recoup themselves by growing opium, which they sold at an enormous price.

Among the brigand chiefs there was one who nourished a deadly hatred for the Communists. Intelligent and shrewd, he did not waste time smoking opium, but led a pleasant life, employing three masters to teach him history and literature. He was a good brigand, even taking an interest in the Catholic religion, which he very much admired. In his own way he was able to save a considerable number of persons from death, employing many spies to help him in his struggle against Communism. One day he said to me, laughing:

Your principles are excellent, but mine are more practical and effective. When I have a Communist in my hands, the only grace I allow him is the best of all—I bury him alive.'

I asked him if there were many Communists in his district.

'I do not care,' he answered, 'whether they are my subjects or not. If you went out, shut your eyes and dug a hole anywhere you liked in my territory, you would find a Communist.'

It was an exaggeration, but I know for a fact that the number of Communists buried alive every day varied between fifteen and twenty.

The other brigands were more or less anti-Communist, but they were not so zealous; they treated the Japanese with respect, but they hated the conquerors with all their hearts and tried to have as little as possible to do with them. On the other hand, they were on the best of terms with the Nationalists, whom they helped in every way, hoping that in the future their good services would be recognized by their being awarded governmental support.

Such was the state of affairs that obtained in our district and more or less in all northern China during the Japanese occupation.

From the beginning of the conflict the Japanese always enjoyed the initiative and won every battle—indeed, none of those who watched the campaign from near at hand had any doubt that they were going to win the war. But it must be admitted that they failed to profit by their successes and made many mistakes. One that affected us personally was the transfer to Hsinsiang of the armies of Pang Ping-hsun and Sun Tien-ying, which removed a thorn in the Communists' side and allowed the areas of Linhsien and Huihsien to fall automatically under their control, so that in 1943 they became the undisputed masters of the mountains of Taihanku almost as far as Peking. This was a turning-point in the development of Communism, and we missionaries viewed the event with horror, foreseeing all the terrible and inevitable consequences.

At the same time, Mussolini's government fell in Italy, and two years later Germany's dream of greatness faded. Japan found herself facing alone the formidable might of the Anglo-American alliance. It was obvious that sooner or later she would have to submit. Into whose hands would China fall? The Communists plucked up their courage and sought to profit by the death agony of the invaders. In June 1945 the troops of General Liu Pei-cheng descended from the Taihanku mountains and advanced into the plain with the intention of dealing a final blow to the Japanese.

At this point my story begins—a day-to-day narrative based on the diary I managed to keep during those months. The happenings of every day were thrown hastily on the page. We lived from day to day, waiting for the climax, and this suffocating sense of waiting forced me, for some reason that I do not understand, to write and therefore to search feverishly for pieces of paper. One day I even tore down a picture of Mao Tse-tung that was hanging on the wall of the room opposite to ours. I mixed up, almost savagely, nervousness and news, thoughts and fears, hope and pessimism. I think all those who have been in prison will have shared this craving to write.

The events related took place in a smiling and fertile region in the province of Honan, north of the Yellow River, where the Mission of Weihui, of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions of Milan, was situated. The places mentioned are shown in the sketch map.

I said ‘a fertile region’: the sweat, the sacrifices, the blood of great men whose only fault was to remember history, have made it still more fertile spiritually, so that it was necessary to divide the mission field. In a few years the number of Christians had doubled. Wars, brigandage, tragedy made this blessed vine bear even more fruit, until Communism gave it a wound that men of little faith would have said was mortal. The missionary world bleeds, and that innocent blood will sweep away Communism.



## CHAPTER

# I

*29th June 1945*

THE news that had spread from mouth to mouth during the last few days had become very alarming. Strange encounters on the road some days before, when I was returning from outlying villages to Suiyeh, and the still stranger appearance at the Mission of some completely unknown persons, sometimes in search of medicine, made me think that something was brewing.

I thought over what I knew: nearly all the brigands were on the best possible terms with the Church; the Japanese were almost extravagantly friendly; the spies of the Nationalist government always treated me with respect. The only people with whom I had never been on good terms were the Communists, but from what Chinese Christians had told me, even the Communists did not appear hostile; indeed, at a recent regional meeting, they had expressed themselves in sympathy with the Catholic religion, which had done 'so much good for China.'

While I was turning these things over in my mind, they came to tell me that the Chinese soldiers serving with the Japanese had cut down the telegraph poles, carried off the wire, and closed the gates of Suiyeh. Everyone looked excited and frightened, with cries of, 'They are coming! A hundred thousand, two hundred thousand, four hundred thousand!' But no one dared to say the hated name of the Communists, the *Pa Lu*.

Father Perottoni and I met to decide on a line of conduct. We resolved to stay at our post, whatever happened, and to send a Christian with a cart to bring the holy vessels, vestments and papers from the church, and the two Chinese nuns of the Mission school. By seven o'clock in the evening, the Mission buildings seemed like a convent. The babies from the school were all asleep. We others talked, but all the time we were listening, and our hearts beat a little faster. At ten

o'clock we went to bed. Perhaps to-morrow things would be normal again.

Accustomed to a life of perpetual alarms, I had little difficulty, even that night, in going to sleep. At midnight I was awakened by shots, the noise of carts and shouting. 'The usual games of the brigands, the Communists and the Japanese,' I thought to myself and went to sleep again.

A little later there was a nervous knock on my door.

'Get up,' said Father Monti, 'and come to Kio Cheng's house.'

Kio Cheng, a Christian, was our neighbour. I put on my trousers and a pair of Chinese slippers, and we went out into the rain. It was very dark, but in the mountains to the west there were repeated flashes of lightning, followed by loud peals of thunder. We climbed the low wall surrounding Kio Cheng's property and then onto the roof of the house, where we joined Father Perottoni on the little tower.

Father Perottoni, head of the Mission of Suiyeh, was in a state of great anxiety. A man of forty-six years older than I—and a tireless worker, he seemed to be suffering from a severe shock. His anxiety and fears were inevitably reflected on Father Monti's face. Poor Father Monti! He had been with us only about a month, having come for a little rest. Misfortune had overtaken him when he least expected it.

'How many are they?' I asked.

Silence told me more than any words. An immense mass of people was advancing slowly towards us. The rain forced us to come down, wondering what danger hung over us. We heard cries in the Mission precincts, which the Communists had already entered. I thought of the poor little boys and girls.

A heavy blow on the door of the courtyard made us tremble.

'Open!' they shouted from the street.

'Don't be afraid,' said Kio Cheng, 'and don't speak. They'll go away.'

But the noise of feet and curses showed that the *Pa Lu* had already entered the courtyard. We would face them, and God's will be done.

The door was opened and Father Perottoni went out first. A prolonged 'Ah' was the Communists' first greeting. In the dark it was almost impossible to see the expressions on their faces. They were dripping with water and had a sour smell of sulphur and sweat. They demanded an explanation of our presence in a private house, and forbade us to return to the Mission. Two soldiers stayed to guard us. 'We are prisoners! We are prisoners!' The words beat in my brain.

like hammers, but caused neither grief nor pain. After escaping many dangers, even I had fallen into the trap.

Father Perottini was recalled to the Mission. The *Pa Lu* had discovered that there was a dispensary and wanted to know what medicines we possessed, for they were badly in need of them.

30th June

Day had come and last night's thunderstorm was over, but it was still cloudy and raining. Towards six o'clock we went back to the Mission, where we found the staff, pupils and Chinese nuns all safe and sound. We passed through them and they looked at us with frightened eyes, terrified by the shouts and threats of the soldiers. Nobody seemed interested in us and we made the most of this fact.

Father Perottini and I went to the church, where there was still the Reserved Sacrament. It was a horrible and disgusting scene that met our eyes—mules, horses, donkeys everywhere, even under the altar. Father Perottini tried to eat the consecrated wafers, while I stopped at the door and spoke to a man with a red angry face and thick lips, his sunken eyes almost hidden by a pair of yellow celluloid spectacles.

'Who are you?' he asked with a threatening look.

'I am a missionary of the Catholic Church,' I answered.

His eyes blazed and he stared at me with an expression of hatred. His movements were jerky and I could see that he was trembling. He grasped a big revolver hanging at his side.

'What are you doing here?' he demanded.

'I teach my religion,' I replied calmly.

He gave me a smile that I can only describe as devilish, but perhaps it was merely his natural expression.

'You seem intelligent,' he went on, 'so you know that God, that useless myth, does not exist. That friend of yours is eating the sacred wafers. I know all about your doctrines. The people don't want to hear anything about your shameful beliefs.'

'That is not my opinion,' I retorted, 'or the opinion of those who believe in God.'

'Fool! The time is over when you can mislead my people with such nonsense.'

Taking some sheets of paper out of his dirty pouch, he handed me one.

'See how many generals and high officials have become Communists. Look at what we've done.'

He gave me another sheet purporting to be a map of China. I looked at the pieces of paper and had difficulty in suppressing a pitying smile. I was about to speak when the report of a gun, a second and then a third, recalled my questioner to his duty. He looked towards the town, then made a sudden dash for the door of the Mission, cursing as he went.

Father Perottoni had finished his task and went to the middle of the courtyard. Our greatest anxiety was at an end; the sacred wafers had been eaten. We looked round. I should have preferred to be blind and deaf. The only empty place was the dispensary and we took refuge there, like three mice fallen into the hands of a mob of cruel boys. Here our calvary began. The Communists came and went, laughed, threatened and did what they liked. We tried to answer calmly and to show no fear.

About midday the procession diminished and it was possible to speak to our schoolmaster. We asked him some questions, but he, poor fellow, could not say anything but 'Shenfu'<sup>1</sup> and then burst into tears. There was nothing we could do. Everything was in confusion. To justify their conduct, the Communists shouted:

'Soon these foreign devils will be buried alive.'

One of them tried to harangue the children, but these little Chinese knew how to answer back.

'We shall see if you will answer like that in a few days,' jeered the Communists.

During the afternoon, the Communists made holes in the walls, and posted sentries at every corner of the Mission buildings and even on the roofs. The noise and shouting increased. They arrived and left in large numbers, bringing long ladders, bundles of rope, and stretchers. It seemed that they were going to attack Suiyeh, the ladders serving to scale the walls, the rope to tie the feet of those who would climb to certain death.<sup>2</sup> A trembling, frightened multitude of these men destined to be slaughtered passed through the courtyard of the Mission, their mouths open like those of men in agony. These were the *Tzü Tung Ping*—the 'Volunteers.'

Soon it was dark. The curses and the shouting stopped almost suddenly. It was a moment when hatred became almost tangible. Our anxiety increased. Would the town resist? The Japanese garrison was

<sup>1</sup> 'Father' in the Roman Catholic use of the word. Literally, 'god (or divine) father.'

<sup>2</sup> This inhuman practice is explained on a later page.

a miserable handful—an officer and eight soldiers. Chinese troops were serving with them, but what could they do against this overwhelming mass of Communists?

A trumpet sounded and the battle began—two hours of shattering noise. The eastern gate fell and the Communists poured into the town. Another breach was made at the other eastern gate, but this time by the defenders. The commandant of the Chinese troops had collected his best men and succeeded in escaping through this breach. A man who had been a brigand all his life could not do anything else. The Japanese had sought safety in their little fort. About midnight came another trumpet call, some scattered rifle-shots and then the silence of death. Suiyeh had fallen.

### *1st July*

The Communists brought to the Mission anything valuable they found in the town. This procession of thieves, which had begun at midnight, showed no signs of stopping. The booty was all catalogued and loaded on mules, which, in convoys of fifteen or twenty, set off for the mountains to the west.

At ten o'clock in the morning, two Christian women came to see me. How they managed to get there, God only knew. They were crying and gave us fruit and some pancakes.

Busy with other things, the Communists paid no attention to us and we made use of the opportunity to save the sacred vessels. The woman who waited on us was known as *Mei-ti-niang*—‘Mother of the Mei.’ A former concubine, she had been a Christian for some years. She listened to our talk about the sacred vessels, thought for a moment, then went away. Shortly afterwards she returned with a large bundle containing chalices, pyxes, some pairs of trousers and pieces of cloth, some of her own clothes and some of the vestments.

‘I shall put all these in a safe place,’ she said, and shouldering the bundle, went away.

We looked after her with alarm; she had some miles to walk before reaching her house and the *Pa Lu* were swarming all over the country-side. If she were discovered, she would pay for her temerity with her life. But *Mei-ti-niang* was not afraid. She pursued her way through the confusion of soldiers, animals and heaps of booty, out of the door of the Mission, reaching the open fields. A sentry, who was sitting on the side of the road at a little distance from the building, stopped her and wanted to know what she was carrying.

'Look,' said the woman throwing down the bundle.

'Whose is this stuff and where are you taking it?'

'It's mine and I'm taking it to my house.'

'It isn't yours. It belongs to the Catholic Church.'

'But I'm a Catholic, and so it belongs to me. Have you anything else to say?'

The words and determination of the woman had their effect. The sentry looked at her dumbstruck, then, feeling perhaps that it might settle a matter that was beyond him, enquired:

'Have you a permit?'

'I'll get one at once,' she replied. 'You look after these things.'

When she told us what she had said to him, it astonished us—or, truthfully, frightened us.

'Don't be afraid,' she said. 'Write me a permit quickly, and put the Mission stamp on it.'

'But you are mad!' we said to her.

'No, no! Make haste.'

The schoolmaster wrote the permit, the woman took it and went away. A boy followed her to see what would be the end of this unpleasant business. Most fortunately the Communist sentry, who could not read, was satisfied with the piece of paper and let the woman pass.

We heard that the handful of Japanese in the little fort, having made a desperate resistance and exhausted their ammunition, had collected some hand-grenades, seated themselves on the top of the pile and blown themselves up.

### *2nd July*

The usual mass of people, soldiers, prisoners and loot. The sentry at the door refused to allow anyone to come in. This surprised us and we determined to find out what the Communists meant to do with us. I went into the courtyard and walked towards the gate, where I stopped and asked the sentries about the military operations.

'The Communists are winning,' answered one. 'At this moment, even Peking is in our hands.'

'How wonderful! You are marvellous,' I said, then with a careless air walked away towards the country.

Nobody stopped me. Another ten yards and I should be safe in the sunken road, which was like the dry bed of a torrent. But the solitude beyond and the temptation to take shameful flight made me shudder. As if escaping from some danger, I hastily retraced my steps.

But why had they not stopped me? If it was so easy to get out, we could try to escape. I told my two companions what I thought, but they were against it for many reasons. We hoped that the Japanese might take some sudden initiative.

Meanwhile, in the town and outside it, the Communists had begun reprisals. Many had already been killed after the most degrading tortures; no doubt our turn would come.

At certain tragic moments in one's life, one begins a hasty examination of one's conscience and involuntarily one is more and more frightened, remembering things one has done without giving them a thought at the time. I recalled having left anti-Communist propaganda among the books in the school library, and in my room. Our agitation was increased by the thought that the Communists had already discovered this literature. On making enquiries, we learnt that the school books had not been touched because they were in a locked cupboard. But those in my room? The crisis sharpened my wits. Some of the pupils had left to join their families, but others had not been able to do so. I called to one of these—an intelligent boy and as sharp as a needle, the son of a good brigand. I had not finished explaining, when he interrupted me.

'Yes, yes, I know where they are. I'll go and get them.'

A true son of his father, he ran off to the kitchen, stole a large carrot and began to munch it. I saw him go into my room, and I waited with my eyes half shut.

'What are you doing here?' shouted the Communist inside.

'I want to see things,' answered the boy.

He went in still chewing his carrot. The Communists were far too busy to waste time on a seventeen-year-old boy, and paid no attention to him. He hunted for the incriminating books, hid them behind his back and, still munching his carrot, returned without any trouble.

The sentry at our door had moved a few steps away, and the boy entered triumphantly. The books from the school were there too. I lighted a match and set fire to the lot. In a few minutes the whole place was full of smoke.

'What are you doing?' shouted the two sentries, rushing to the door.

'We are making a little smoke to drive away the mosquitoes,' I replied.

They went away laughing.

I had plucked out that thorn, but the examination of my conscience

went on all the time, and I was always discovering fresh reasons for fear. Yes, a kind of register kept in exercise-books was hidden under the stones at the bottom of the garden. Those stones might arouse suspicion, and who knew if the register was well hidden? But night had fallen and it was impossible to move about without danger.

### *3rd July*

That morning Mei-ti-niang reappeared with a relative. She was smiling with delight and her first words were:

'The sacred vessels are now safely hidden in my house.'

The Communists, freed from the incessant comings and goings of the last days, had time to devote their attention to us.

'What are those two women doing here?' they shouted from the courtyard.

We said good-bye to the two Christians, advising Mei-ti-niang to go, if possible, to see our fellow priests at Changte.

In the church the Communists were burning the benches, and the representations of the Via Crucis were disappearing. Their threats to us and the teachers were becoming more menacing.

More Christians came to see us.

'Jackals of the European devils, get out of here!' shouted the Communists. 'Your fathers have already been hanged!'

The poor Christians went away, terrified and humiliated.

The telephone rang. It was not very far from us and it was easy to hear what was being said: 'Yes, there are three of them. . . . Italians. . . . Very well. Very well.'

Who was interested in us? What did they want? What was the meaning of that 'Very well'? The noose was tightening. What could we do?

The appearance of a Communist put an end to these melancholy questions.

'Which of you can mend a gramophone?' he asked, then turned to me. 'You? Come along.'

I followed him. Our poor rooms—what a scene of chaos! Books, clothes, papers, rags were scattered everywhere. The windows were cracked, the cupboards broken. Piles of hand-grenades, rifles and blood-stained uniforms were lying about. While I was taking the gramophone to pieces to find out what was wrong, the crucifix round my neck slipped out of my shirt, causing the greatest amusement to the bystanders.

'What's that cursed gewgaw?' said a dirty youth of seventeen or eighteen, grabbing at it.

The insult stabbed me to the heart, and without thinking I took hold of the Communist star in his cap.

'And what's that cursed object?'

We glared at each other, ready for a fight.

'What's that fellow doing here? Send him away,' thundered a Communist officer who had watched the scene.

I retired, my hands covered with oil, my heart in a turmoil.

The schoolmaster had warned me that the Communists wanted to know how many Christians we had (this question was put to us a thousand times during those days), and whether we had any registers. Their insistence alarmed me very much and made me decide to destroy those exercise-books hidden under the stones. I went into the courtyard and met a Christian girl, a sensible child, but too timid, I thought, to be of use. I begged her to ask her brother and some other Christians to destroy the exercise-books. She looked at me with great innocent eyes.

'But cannot I do that for you, Father?'

'Try,' I replied, 'but take care not to be caught.'

What else could I have said to one so guileless and without fear? She went out of the Mission and reappeared leading by the hand a little cousin eight years old. They went into the garden and, pretending to be picking grass, disappeared behind the rows of vines. About half an hour later, she returned quite calmly with the exercise-books under her arm. She recrossed the courtyard, went through the girls' school and was just going out of the gate when the sentry stopped her.

'What have you got there?'

With a sudden movement he dragged her back and snatched the books.

With a cry of fright, the poor little girl was reduced to silence. The sentry put the books on a millstone close to the gate and turned to call an officer. In that second, the girl made a sign to her little cousin, who seemed to be there by chance. He seized the books and ran out of the gate. The sentry shouted, but the child was already out of danger. When the officer came out, the sentry, with a filthy curse, turned to hand over the culprit, who was standing there like a block of wood, her head hanging down.

'What is it?' said the officer.

The wooden statue came to life, and with the passion of a Chinese

woman when she is roused, she began to abuse the sentry, accusing him of having insulted a woman, and demanding an apology. The man tried to explain, but the girl raised her voice so that she could be heard by the entire neighbourhood. The officer was bewildered and, to put an end to an annoying scene in which a girl was involved, said to her: 'Go away, go away!' And the episode was at an end.

During the afternoon, the so-called army doctor came to see us.

'I am tired,' he remarked. 'I've had fever for some days and now have a very high temperature. But one must sacrifice oneself for the sake of the people.'

'You are right. That's the proper spirit. Then they will remember you after you are dead.'

He received my remark with a sour smile.

'Death,' he said, 'swallows up everything, and when one is dead one is finished for ever.'

'And if there should be another life?'

'Nonsense,' he answered in a bored voice.

He got up suddenly and went away whistling a Communist song.  
Happy man!

#### *4th July*

More prisoners had arrived. Half-way between Suiyeh and Changte, which was also in our district, two armoured cars with Japanese soldiers were attacked and destroyed by the Communists after a fierce struggle.

We heard from some Christians that Father Baglieri, wanting to know what had happened to us, had made his way from Tangyn as far as the outlying hills of Suiyeh. We sent him a letter describing our position and begging him to send news of us to our superiors. At the end we said: 'If the Communists murder us, which is very probable, send our greetings to our loved ones in Italy, to our superiors and our fellow missionaries.'

The nervousness of the Communists was increasing, and there had been some beatings. There was a People's Court, at which our murder was doubtless to be decided. Everyone was summoned except the Christians, who were dangerous people, jackals of the European devils, spies, and the like.

'What have they done,' the others were asked, 'these Italian dogs?'

'They have always done good.'

'They have harassed you.'

'No, they have saved many people from the hands of the Japanese and the brigands. The one with the red beard<sup>1</sup> has cured many sick people. They gave us medicine and did not ask to be paid. They have taught our boys.'

This affectionate and spontaneous defence of us was a blow to the Communists, who withdrew in order not to lose more 'face,' which in China is something before which all else must give way.

At three o'clock three leading Communists came to see us. One was rather old and as mysterious as sin. The second was a man who seemed to have been put together for a bet, the third a perfect representative of the criminal classes. This last spoke to us, and what he said was sly and provocative. He ended by inviting us to their *ken-chu-ti*, their Communist lair. I shall never forget his ironical and devilish smile. We did not know what to think of this interview; certainly this man meant us no good. I was convinced that we should endeavour to escape.

The sacred images had disappeared from our rooms, and the photograph of Monsignor Zanin, Apostolic Delegate in China, had been taken out of its frame.

### 5th July

We asked permission to get some of our books. After interminable bureaucratic circumlocutions, they took us to our rooms, from which anything of the slightest value had disappeared, including our personal papers.

'It would be safer,' they suggested, 'if you put all your stuff in one place.'

How kind! It was as if they had said to us: 'Collect the ashes.'

'Is anything missing?' they asked.

We replied ironically that under the *Pa Lu* there was no fear of losing anything. Outside in the courtyard, the soldiers were shouting and clamouring:

'Bury them alive, the foreign devils! Death to the blood-suckers!'

The leading Communists who had come to see us on the previous day had established themselves in the Mission and occupied our rooms. They demanded sheets, blankets, mattresses.

'We are sorry,' we replied, 'but all those are in your possession. Look for them.'

Our neighbour Kio Cheng, who was a Christian in his own way

<sup>1</sup> Padre Suigo, the author.

and fond of us priests, came to tell us that the Communists, in answer to an enquiry about us, had replied that to-morrow or next day they would drive us out of their territory.

Perhaps it was true.

*6th July*

The sentry was always at our door. There was a bustle going on among the Communists, who were worried about something. Hardly anyone came to annoy us that morning. Goods, arms, and prisoners were continually leaving.

At one o'clock, after luncheon, a man appeared. Father Monti and Father Perottoni were asleep and I was writing a letter. He came in, sat down and began to abuse us, the Church and the Pope. He asked me where we had stolen the money; he said that our houses were too fine and that we had certainly made money out of the people. I answered smilingly that I too was a Communist and I proved it. I took the revolver from him and I said:

'You like my things? My house? You want to own them? You are free to do so, but I am also free to take your things. Is not that what Communism means?'

He gave me a furious glance. The servant came in and was abused as a traitor and a jackal of the Europeans. Four Christians arrived whom I had not seen for several years because they had been in Communist territory. The fellow did not know them and, trembling to find himself confronted by men who might be in positions of authority, said no more and left hastily, so we were able to talk freely to the Christians. One of them remarked, when speaking of the articles of the Communist programme:

'In some places the population has been reduced by half. Most of them have had to appear before a People's Court, which always ends by their committing a crime.'

I thought this was an exaggeration caused by fear. They spoke in a frightened, angry way, and tried to whisper for fear of being overheard.

★ ★ ★

The method used by the Communists, first to infiltrate into a district and then to conquer it, is unscrupulous, but one cannot deny that it is clever. The occupation is prepared for by cunning propaganda. The use of arms, however tragic, is nothing but the climax of a very clearly defined plan of campaign.

During the visits I had paid to different villages before the occupation of Suiyeh it was not difficult to find persons who, from good or evil motives, wanted to talk about 'the new kind of brigand.' The villagers were terrified of such people and spoke of them with fear. Usually they were strangers to the village, being therefore regarded with suspicion, the more so because they had escaped from the Communist zone and managed to earn their living by working for some rich family.

From their way of speaking, one realized that they were not the usual type of villager. When questioned, they answered in a peculiar way, contradicting themselves. My enquiry was always the same:

'Is it true that the Communists are so brutal?'

The answer was so cautious that it left the questioner still more curious.

'They are Chinese, like the rest of us. A fire of straw,<sup>1</sup> Father, and then . . .'

There was another remarkable fact: the same person, interrogated again, avoided answering, declaring that he knew nothing. Evidently these clever agents did not want to compromise themselves with a 'foreign devil.' Usually this type of propagandist was to be found in places close to the Communist zone, where news of Communist terror spread quickly, creating panic, especially among the rich, and sometimes causing headlong flight. The task, therefore, of this fifth column was to calm people's fears, and if possible prevent an exodus. It often happened that these strange 'workers' left their jobs and disappeared. When their master succeeded in tracing them, he almost always found them with some family anxious to dissuade him from leaving the village.

'Why run away? You have not committed any crime. The Communists seem to be the protectors of the people.'

This enthusiasm, although cautiously expressed so as not to arouse suspicion, produced very different mental reactions. Some people were not slow in discovering the motive behind this disinterested friendship, and were more persuaded than ever to put as great a distance as possible between themselves and such counsellors; others allowed themselves to be deceived and fell into the trap, this group being the special target for a more subtle form of propaganda.

Because of his position as a guest in the village, and still more because of the danger of being discovered by the authorities, the fifth columnist never gave himself away by fanning ill-feeling between the

<sup>1</sup> False alarm.

two groups. That would follow in time. Being of the same race, he knew that a Chinese will not lift a finger unless he sees an immediate advantage to himself. An extremely practical nation, the Chinese cannot imagine that anyone will run a risk, merely to take part in politics. This simple-minded indifference is natural to a people who live what might be called an Arcadian life, and is a serious obstacle to Communist expansion.

So the Communists adopted new ways of approach. These so-called workers assumed the role of benefactors. Naturally their gifts had to be paid for, and in this way secret adherents, more or less enamoured of the new creed, sprang up among the people. They were the raw recruits and often to test their loyalty they were forced to go to the Communist zone to obtain what had been promised them. This ruse had been carefully thought out. When they entered the zone of which they had heard such frightening accounts, these poor dupes were received with a cordiality they had never known before. They returned more than ever convinced that Communism was a good thing and that the Communists were fine fellows who kept their word. It cannot be denied that these tactics produced results.

I am writing of a time when China was at the mercy of the Japanese, who for many reasons were opposed to Communism. As orientals they were experts in stratagems of a more or less political nature, and were not long in discovering the reason for these frequent nightly crossings of the frontier. The Suiyeh Mission was only three miles from the deep and wide trench that divided the two zones, and every night we had to listen to rifle-fire, attacks, skirmishes, which always ended in the defeat of the Communists, who, in their retreat, left some dead or wounded on the ground. It was not unusual to find among the wounded and prisoners some of the people who were returning from the visits I have described. Forced to confess, they gave the Japanese information about people, places and propaganda intrigues. Counter-measures were taken and the Communists who had been masquerading as labourers either fell into the hands of the Japanese or disappeared.

The most dangerous secret agents were those who gave themselves out to be anti-Communists. Their job was to get into touch with suspected persons, the so-called 'enemies of the people,' the 'faithful jackals of the Japanese.' They played their parts so well that many managed to filter into Japanese organizations and to perform difficult missions. They were led by men ready to carry out any order. The more dangerous the task, the more they welcomed it—blowing up

bridges and railways, kidnapping people, spreading terror among the population. Their activities extended from the highest circles to the lowest brothels. It seemed that no human power could touch them, so closely knit and well-organized were they. All the astuteness of the Japanese appeared to waste itself in useless efforts. A watch was kept on the railway stations, the markets, the shops, the means of communication, private families, even on our school and Mission buildings. The surveillance was so rigorous that the least suspicion might be fatal, and victims were countless. But—what bitter irony!—the head of this security force was a Communist.

The truth was finally discovered. The Japanese had trained special agents who co-operated in this secret service. One night one of these, working on the railway, succeeded in capturing a Communist messenger, who, not knowing of the presence of the agent, was trying to enter the Japanese zone. The prisoner was taken to Hantan and confessed under torture. The following morning the whole Communist gang was in Japanese hands. A few days afterwards they were all executed.

I remember one detail. One of these scoundrels, having finished digging his own grave, shouted in broken Japanese: ‘Give me a brick to serve as a pillow.’ He was given one. He lay down and put it under his head. ‘Too low. Give me another.’ When he received the second, he put it on the top of the first and lay down again. ‘Good. Now throw in the earth.’ Even when his body was almost covered with soil, his horrible curses on himself, the Japanese, the Communists and the traitors could still be heard.

These happenings did not in any way weaken the sadistic determination of the Communists; their propaganda continued to spread like a deadly poison despite the greatest obstacles. They showed a criminal vitality proper to the sons of darkness.

When, in the opinion of those in command, a zone was sufficiently prepared, the fifth column were withdrawn and their places taken by other agents, who apparently had no job. They wandered about idly, taking note of suspects and those whose names were already in the Communist black book. We three priests were no doubt among them. Three months before we fell into the hands of the *Pa Lu*, I had had to do with one of these spies, and had not been sure whether he was a Communist or not. He told me that he had returned a few days previously from the University of Peking because of ill-health.

On the 5th July I had seen him pass our temporary prison. The final

period therefore is characterized by the comparative calm that precedes a storm. The action taken this time was the occupation of Suiyeh; it was significant and gave us much cause for speculation. So far as we knew, it was the first time the Communists had dared to attack a town in the Japanese sphere of influence. Either they were very sure of their strength or—which was more probable—they would—as they were doing—sack the town and then retire. In earlier days it was not like this; then they occupied village after village, and even some larger centres to which they attached more importance than did the Japanese.

When the Japanese forced the people to dig the great trench from Peking to the Yellow River, the Communists saw that the game was in their hands, and spread over the countryside declaring they had won a victory, shouting it even under the rampart itself. In this patient and methodical campaign, the soldiers had to wait for the orders of the chiefs. They were orders entirely contrary to military strategy or ideas. An old Chinese proverb says: 'Just as one does not take good iron to make nails, one does not take good men to make soldiers.' The meaning is obvious; the Chinese have always detested soldiers, not because they are bad men in themselves, but because of the outrages they commit and the licentiousness of their conduct once they are put into uniform. I have often heard the Chinese say: 'If all soldiers are men who do not reason, the Communist soldiers are savage animals.' Notwithstanding all the propaganda, most of the people hated, and still hate, Communism—and the Communists know it.

And so drastic measures were taken. When a Communist soldier entered a village, he was ordered to be as friendly and kind as possible. 'Woe to him who is discovered committing any outrage. The people must feel that they are face to face with men who are called soldiers, but are the star of hope for the people. What happened in the past must not happen again. We must show ourselves to be different from the Japanese and the traitors of Chiang Kai-shek.' Accordingly, the Communist soldier knows how to behave himself. 'Old fellow,<sup>1</sup> can you lend me a knife?' 'Old lady, will you lend me a saucepan?' The villagers naturally make excuses, being sure that the articles will not be returned. 'Never mind,' says the soldier. 'I will go and look elsewhere. Forgive me for having bothered you.' He bows politely, leaving the 'old fellows' and 'old ladies' of the village amazed at his civility.

<sup>1</sup> 'Old' is a most honourable term of address in China.

If by chance someone, from fear or because the incident might cause unpleasantness in the future, lends a bowl, a saucepan or a knife, it is returned spotlessly clean and in good order. The news of this astonishing behaviour spreads very quickly and people who do not see anything more in it than the simple fact, and do not know how to conceal their pleasure, go about declaring, 'Now it is perfectly clear that the Communists love the people.' Poor people! Perhaps in a few days they will be tortured. And those who refused? They too will have to pay the price.



Another ruffian appeared and told us that the *Pa Lu* are a blessing from heaven, and proved it by saying that, while the people were suffering here, in the Communist zone the countryside was prosperous, and it always rained at the right time.

'Because,' he added, 'you are here and you are the enemies of Communism.'

He went away happily, having repeated his lesson.

## CHAPTER

# 2

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*7th–8th July 1945*

**Y**ESTERDAY's excitement among the *Pa Lu* had so increased that we wondered if they were expecting orders to leave. Nevertheless, the Communist authorities went on with their work, executing several Chinese and hunting down, with the intention of killing them also, the many who had fled during the past few days, among them our neighbour, Kio Cheng. His brother, also a Christian, came to tell us that, on the previous day, the Communists had gone from family to family of the non-Christians, asking for information about us. Everyone had spoken in our favour and nothing that could do us any harm had been discovered.

Mei-ti-niang, who had not ceased to go about, came to tell us that the Japanese had advanced, this time in armoured cars, and that the *Pa Lu* in the villages had retired to the mountains. We began to hope that they would be leaving us too. Most of the *Min Ping*<sup>1</sup> had already gone. After supper the telephone rang. The talk was about us.

'Yes, they are here . . . Two or three Italians . . . Very well . . . When? . . . And their servants? . . . Very well.'

A servant and the schoolmaster were listening to this and other telephone conversations, hoping to gather something definite. At midnight the telephone rang again: orders for the *Pa Lu* to leave at daylight.

At three in the morning excited whispering, mixed with curses, gave warning of some upheaval. They were really going, thank God! By five o'clock the Mission was empty. It was Sunday and the Christians arrived full of joy. We were even happier than they!

With their help we began to clean the Church. What unspeakable filth! In my room we found three hand-grenades hidden by the

<sup>1</sup> The Soldiers of the People, the lowest grade in the Communist military hierarchy.

Communists in the *prieu-dien*, and in Father Perottoni's as well. We said Mass in turn while the Christians made their confessions and received the Sacrament.

After Mass the Christians insisted that we should leave, saying that there was still a party of the *Pa Lu* in the town. Father Perottoni thought that the storm had passed and that it was useless to run away. We wandered about the Mission looking for anything that was left. The Chinese nun was persuaded to hide her veil and to flee. A builder from Nankuhsien, who had come in search of news, told us what had happened in his district. Everything in the school had been destroyed, the Chinese nun had disappeared, the sacred vessels and vestments had been burned or had disappeared, and the pictures of the Via Crucis had also been burned. The Communists had insisted that the Christians should renounce their religion.

At eleven o'clock, when all the Christians were busy cleaning, I found myself in the courtyard. Three armed men appeared from the girls' school, one belonging to the *Pa Lu*, the others to the *Min Ping*. The leader advanced with a smile that was not at all reassuring. I invited him into the house, where he told me, without stopping to enquire how many we were, that we had to leave at once because the enemy (i.e. the Japanese) were close.

'General Pei's order,' he said, 'is here.'

He handed me a sheet of paper, which I took and read. Every line is imprinted on my memory. 'Treachery!' I thought. 'Our only safety is in flight, if there is still time.'

'Wait,' I said to him. 'I will call my friends.'

I found them in the courtyard, told them what had happened and urged flight. Father Perottoni could not make up his mind and wanted to see the paper. We all went to the Communist, but our arguments and protests were useless.

'You must leave. It is an order. That's enough.'

I made a last effort. On the table was a bottle of wine for the Mass. I thought of making this blustering fellow drunk. As a matter of fact I succeeded, but other armed men had entered the courtyard and the tragedy had begun. Christians ran in, imploring, shouting. There was nothing to be done. The *Pa Lu* man followed Father Perottoni, who had gone into the girls' school, where the women were screaming and crying. Waving his revolver, the soldier shouted:

'These Italian devils have ill-treated you for so many years and you are still crying.'

Mei-ti-niang answered him: 'Who has ill-treated us? You!'

Controlling my nerves, which were making me tremble, I succeeded in getting the other soldiers into the school and told the servant to distract their attention by giving them something to eat and drink. I went out of the Mission. There were no armed men in sight, so I rushed back and insisted on our taking flight. The mental and physical excitement prevented the others from making up their minds. Meanwhile a deputation of Christians and non-Christians had gone to General Pei to intercede for us, but he would not see them. Another group of armed men arrived and prevented us from leaving our room. They searched the house, first of all rushing to the places where the hand-grenades had been hidden. They were disappointed.

With great difficulty I succeeded in writing a last message. I gave my will to a faithful Christian and also my watch, the only thing I had left, so that he could take it to the town for safety. The Christians were crying in despair. The *Pa Lu* soldier pushed them out with threats.

It was 4 o'clock on the 8th July, 1945.

The Mission was full of weeping Christians when we left it, escorted by four armed men. We were too paralysed physically and mentally to feel any emotion. I walked like an automaton. We went past the wall of the Mission, the servants and teachers bidding us a hopeless farewell. From the terraces on the hill to the west we could hear the wailing of the Christians, and see the poor devastated town of Suiyeh. A sob rose in my throat.

'March, you lazy fellow,' said one of our guards, giving me a push with his rifle.

At Hsikan, a little place not far from the Mission, the Christians came to meet us crying with sympathy. About six o'clock we entered the first of the mountain gorges. A last glance over the plain of Suiyeh, lighted up by a sinister ray of sunshine, then one turn and we were among the mountains. What a nightmare, what misery!

Late in the evening we arrived at Peipi, where they gave us a little tasteless broth and allowed us to lie down on some straw. While we were exchanging our melancholy impressions, an order from the chief made us get up and they took us to the village school. It was raining in torrents. About nine o'clock everyone went to sleep. I left the school and returned without being seen. Weariness and a sense of fatality seemed to reconcile us to being prisoners. Another order sent us back to our first lodging. Straw torches on the side of the mountain, in the country below near the river and on the opposite side of the river,

seemed to symbolize this diabolical Red World. . . . We threw ourselves down on the straw. The sentries slept, while outside the storm increased. Why were they taking us away?

9th July

The next morning we got up feeling completely hopeless. It was still raining and the view was horrible. Two high peaks like enormous claws rose above this little place as if ready to crush it at any moment; below was a little torrent filled with rocks and looking like a giants' graveyard. When we went on the road we were met by thousands of curious glances, most of them kind and pitying. On the other side of the little stream were the last *Min Ping* who had left Suiyeh during the night. They greeted us with jeering laughter, but there were some pitying faces among them—perhaps Christians who did not dare to proclaim their faith. We started, following a path that led up the mountain, attended by our armed escort. The *Min Ping* column, anxious to see us and to laugh at us, increased in numbers. There were two holes in my slippers. The road we had gone along yesterday, wrapped in our own gloomy thoughts, had damaged my feet, and to-day they were swollen and painful, but I must go on.

Finally, about midday, we arrived at an important village, where the *Kuchang* (the head of the district) lived. He was a rather silent young man with a dark face. He almost seemed to pity us, driving off the people who were staring at us and inviting us to go in and rest, but this was impossible; the impudent curiosity of the crowd was too great. We left at about two o'clock. The inhabitants crowded round us in a frightening way. Even when we were clear of the village, the shouting mob followed us. They wanted to see us, to touch us, to spit in our faces. A 'good' brigand, moved by pity, chased off the truculent, half-naked crowd.

We marched down hill towards the mountains of Linhsien. The news of our arrest had spread and people hurried from the fields to laugh at us. Father Perottoni went up to the head of the escort. He said he could not understand this behaviour on the part of the Communists; their chief knew all about the Church and that we were good men. It rained incessantly. My feet became more and more painful. At five we reached Peilinyang, where nobody wanted to take us in. It was the old story: the persecutors afraid of even the shadows of their victims. They sent us from one chief to another, till finally, there being nothing else to do, the two highest authorities of the

Taihanku region—that is to say, the *Fu Chu-hsi*, the supreme political and military vice-chiefs—had to take us in.

‘Sit down and listen,’ said the military chief. ‘I have nothing against you. I did not find any arms in your house.’ (This imposter had hidden the hand-grenades in our rooms.) ‘Therefore I am handing you over to the political chief.’

He spoke with a look that varied suddenly between grimness and ferocity.

‘Do you know,’ he went on, ‘why you have been made prisoners?’ We were silent. ‘Because you are priests of the Catholic Church, and we know that you are the sworn enemies of Communism.’

A deep and consoling joy welled up in my soul. They had arrested us because we were good men—priests. All my despair vanished and for a second my soul was filled with divine consolation. ‘Lord, I am not worthy of this grace.’ I did not listen to anything else he said, catching but confusedly the reason for our being seized.

‘We know the contacts you have had with our enemies.’

‘What enemies?’

‘The Kuomintang and the Japanese.’

He said a great deal more, but I was thinking of other things. They took us into a room near the street door, our guards being two armed *Min Ping*. As soon as we got into the room, we looked at each other, and after a short silence discussed our impressions. It was evening. The pain in my feet, the emotions of the day and exhaustion, had their natural effect: I developed a high temperature; but I seemed to be happy. We threw ourselves down on the improvised bed—four filthy planks and half a Chinese door. ‘My life,’ I wrote, ‘is in Thy hands, O God.’

### 10th July

I woke with the impression of having overslept. My confused mind tried to grasp a vague thought, then grasped it more clearly:

‘I must make haste. The man is seriously ill and is waiting for me. Should I say Mass here or there? Better say it here. But if the sick man dies?’

A shout from the nearby courtyard recalled me to the reality of the situation. Father Perottoni and Father Monti were already at their devotions. We were brought a bowl of rice for breakfast. So we were not to be martyred?

An officer came in and spoke to us kindly. He suggested sending the servant, who had followed us, to Suiyeh to collect our possessions. The suggestion, even taking into account that if we had refused we should have had to agree in the end, seemed a good one. We made a list of what he had to bring back, if it were still possible to find anything, and he set off accompanied by a soldier. The owner of the house appeared—a man of about fifty, looking ill and tired. He wanted some drops for his eyes, from which he suffered very much. Another officer came to see us. He talked with an incredible smugness, apparently to comfort us!

I tried to go out into the street, but the sentry pushed me back with a blow from his rifle, which brought our real position back to me; all the polite words, the kindness were a smoke-screen. Why should we deceive ourselves? Why should we ask for news of our destination? But the strange thing was that the more we were disappointed, the sweeter it seemed to hope, for hope provided a reason for life.

Towards evening a man came in and talked to us about the beauties of Communism, but he did not appear to believe what he was saying, perhaps because he saw that his words were falling on stony ground. He left us quietly. We threw ourselves down on our bed of planks with the pleasant delusion in our minds that by that time the servant would have arrived at Suiyeh and that to-morrow he would return with the things we needed to say Mass, and with news.

### *11th July*

About ten the servant arrived. He came to see us before going to the chiefs and told us his news in a few words: he had not reached Suiyeh because it had been reoccupied by the Japanese, who every day made an expedition into the mountains to carry out reprisals. The chiefs did not believe his story; it was fortunate that he had been accompanied by the soldier.

They came and told us to get ready to leave, a natural result of the news brought by the servant. Where were we going? They said to Linhsien and then to Hsiaochuang. By midday we were on the road with two guards armed with rifles. Every step was an agony.

At three we arrived at Linhsien where there was absolute desolation. The people looked at us stupefied, and said, ‘They are three Americans who have baled out from an aeroplane.’ Even the chiefs, not knowing who we were, received us with honour. The misunderstanding did not last long.

We took the road towards Hochien. Late in the evening we arrived at a village where we spent the night.

*12th July*

Early in the morning we set out with our escort. At last the weather was good and we plodded on in silence. About eight we stopped for a little rest. The passers-by looked at us with astonishment. Once again we started off, but instead of going in the direction of Hsiaochuang, the two guards turned west. Where were they taking us? To the west the high stony mountains stretched for miles, and who knew for how many more weeks we should have to walk? However, a thought came to us almost as the natural outcome of all that we had seen, felt, and endured during those days—they were taking us to some distant place in the mountains and when we arrived there, they would hang us. With this in mind I thought of the past, of my life, of my loved ones, of Paradise which seemed so near, and I comforted myself with the thought that perhaps one day soon I should see my father and mother, and all those dear to me, who had preceded me to our eternal home.

We arrived at the foot of a long chain of mountains, and the further we went the more convinced I became of the justice of my suspicions. We were in the centre of the Communist zone, in the sub-prefecture of Linhsien. It looked like a dead world: not a living creature, not a sign of life. Red, three-cornered heights rose above walls of pale yellow. Our guards made us stop, exchanged some words we could not hear, then one gave a letter to the other, who went towards a house. We sat down to await events.

After half an hour, the soldier returned and, accompanied by him, we entered this silent country. What a contrast to the July sunshine! We followed an interminable labyrinth of stony paths, then they made us halt at a little gate leading into a courtyard. A man came out, stared at us from head to foot, exchanged some words with the soldiers, and with a gesture of indifference invited us to come in. The first person who came to welcome us was a young woman with short hair, a round face, and bleary eyes. She looked at us as if she were feeble-minded, with her mouth half open. We entered a large room, half filled with a long table on which were a great number of papers, orders of the day, advertisements, law papers, school books, etc. On the wall opposite were hung photographs of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh. Five or six persons were talking

listlessly round the table. At our appearance they all fell silent and stared at us; then they asked us some questions and complimented us on our good Chinese. The whole thing gave me the impression of being in a mandarin's office, but who was the mandarin? It was most mysterious. It would not be true to say that we wanted to make his acquaintance. We answered the questions as briefly as possible. The young woman seemed upset by our visit and kept asking different people who we were, why we were there, what we were doing, and so on. She forced herself to speak to me, I answered coldly and she turned away disappointed. She went and fetched a baby—a worthy son of such a mother! Without any words and without any weapons, a battle took place between us and that daughter of sin, a battle we won. 'The children of darkness are wiser in their generation than the children of light.' That is true, but the rest of the passage is also true: 'When they bring you into the synagogues and unto magistrates and powers, take ye no thought now of what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: for the Holy Ghost shall teach you in that same hour what ye ought to say.' This time it was a silent defence. The woman ran away as if in terror; the Holy Ghost had triumphed.

They took us into a courtyard belonging to a private family. A room was made ready for us and at last we could sit down. Would we have to leave again? Would we stay here? Some curious people came in. A man whom Father Perottoni knew arrived—a relative of some Christians—but he did not dare to say who he was. He asked about some missionaries who were at Hsiaochuang, speaking as if he were terrified. They brought us some papers to read.

The son of the house came up to us—a repulsive, impudent creature, his eyes sunken and vicious. In the courtyard outside there were two girls who were afraid to come in. He took one by the arm and brought her up to us, saying: 'Come and look at the foreigners.' When we showed our disgust as plainly as we could, he understood and went away laughing coarsely. This one scene made us understand what depths Communist perversion had reached. When had a Chinese, however depraved, dared to behave like this in public?

We prepared our den. Our feelings about what we had seen were indescribable. They were our first contacts with the Communist world. What would the future hold for us?

*13th July*

A quiet night. Nobody stirred, not even a dog; they had all been killed by the Communists so that their barking might not reveal the movement of troops. I went outside after midnight. The sky was clear and deep. Far to the east were the dark and menacing summits of the mountains beyond which were the Suiyeh Christians, our brethren . . .

The thought of escape still filled my mind; but my swollen feet, weariness, and my two companions, whom I should have had to leave as hostages, dissuaded me, and I returned to our dog-kennel. When I woke, the sun had been up some time. There was not a sound in the courtyard or in the street; it seemed like a country of the dumb.

After 'dinner' a sickly, weedy, chattering youth came to see us. He gave us some papers and asked if we understood them. He then explained some of their contents to us, beginning with professional gravity:

'England . . . Italy . . . France. But perhaps you do not know where those countries are.'

With his dirty finger and long cat-like nail, he pointed to them on a map.

'This is Germany. Across the Channel there is England. Did you understand or not? Be sure to remember.'

We were amazed at the bumptiousness of this stunted youth. Fortunately he soon saw that we were laughing at him and went away.

About midday another youth of about eighteen or nineteen arrived. He had a fine face and intelligent eyes. From his first words we realized that he was someone of importance. Could he be the mandarin? I did not think so. We answered him politely, but without disguising our disappointment at the treatment we were receiving. He asked us gloomily:

'What do you mean?'

Father Perottoni desired nothing better than an opportunity to say what we thought.

'Why have you brought us here? What have you against us? We only want to go back to our post, or if that is impossible, to be free to go to Bishop Chiolino at Weihui.'

The youth was embarrassed; perhaps he did not expect us to state our case so clearly. He tried to conceal the truth, but could not hide it, and gave us to understand that it was useless to talk of going back.

He went away leaving us nothing to say. It was terrible: they had seized us because they believed us to be criminals. To the thought that we had to bear such injustice was added the fear of the consequences of having spoken so openly.

After dinner nobody came to disturb us. About four o'clock we went out to look at the wonders of nature in this enchanting place. The people came and spoke to us quite frankly, but were terrified of being seen with us. We discovered that we were at the headquarters of the Communist Government of the sub-prefecture of Linhsien. Poor people! They gave vent to their feelings, telling us what they had to suffer from the Communists. We went back to our quarters, where we were left in peace. Evening fell and we went to bed early in the hope of going to sleep.

To-day we heard that some of the prisoners from Suiyeh had managed to escape, some had been killed, some were missing. What would our fate be?

#### *14th July*

They brought our food very early, and then told us to get ready to start for Putihsiaochuang, where we would be handed over to the judge of the province. As on all other occasions when we learnt that we had to leave a place, we were alarmed—the reaction of a prisoner to any change in his unhappy state.

We departed at eight o'clock, accompanied by two guards, and passed through the little town of Hochien, objects of curiosity and contempt. On crossing the river, we saw an old Christian from Tienchiaching. He wanted to come and speak to us, but was afraid. We tried to encourage him, telling what was happening to us and begging him to inform other Christians.

After wandering from one place to another, they took us to the prisons at Putihsiaochuang; which meant we had fallen into the clutches of one of the Communist authorities—the judge. There was a large courtyard with a brick pavement; the houses had obviously once belonged to rich people. We went into the room allotted to us. The walls were covered with primitive paintings, but there were also crossed flags, showing clearly that the room had been the quarters of the soldiers of the 40th Army. There were great holes in the walls, the roof was in a precarious state, and rats (the permanent residents in any Chinese house) appeared and disappeared every second. We were brought a table, three stools, three rough bowls and a little straw.

With these meagre furnishings we were 'in our own house.' We looked at each other, tired and silent.

About midday the judge came to see us. He had a thin face, shrewd eyes, and a half-open mouth because he was suffering from a cold in the head. Father Perottoni went out and talked to him for about two hours. The local boys did not fail to come and stare at us. We were brought fifty pounds of flour and some millet. On the whole, things did not seem too bad, especially with regard to the judge, who was apparently prepared to be kind. But . . .

Towards evening we went into the courtyard and made the acquaintance of the owner of the house, a thin old man, together with a young woman of about thirty and three girls, aged sixteen, twelve, and ten. The woman's husband, a bad lot and an opium-smoker, had left home ten years before. They appeared to be a good family. After supper we went back to our 'home' and spent our first night in this new prison. If my loved ones in Italy could know . . . It was better that they should not; they had suffered so much when they allowed me to leave them. It had been a bitter grief to them and I had thought presumptuously that it was the last sorrow I should cause them . . . Instead I was to give them more unhappiness.

### *15th July*

We tried very cautiously to approach the principal door, which opened into the street. Nobody stopped us and we went out. It was an enchanting view. Below to the east on a little rise there was the statue of Christ the Redeemer, which the Communists had not succeeded in destroying, standing above the tomb of our first Bishop, Monsignor Scarella. Further on we could see the seminary building. The church had been demolished. To the north lay the fertile plain of Linhsien, to the west the great mountain range that divides Honan from Hupei. To the south there was a chain of ragged and fantastic peaks, and among them, about twenty-five *li* distant, the Christian district of Tienchiaching and the shrine of the Madonna of Carmel.

We had a stroll and then returned to our kennel. The judge came to see us, smiled in a friendly way and asked us to dinner with him. I speculated on his motive. He talked with considerable knowledge of the Christian religion, making us wonder whether he was an apostate.

We came back rather comforted by this human treatment, yet I could not escape from an indefinable feeling of pessimism after all I

had seen and felt. Our 'home' was in the middle of a group of buildings used as prisons: to the right the men's prison, to the left the women's, with sentries at the doors day and night. There was no sentry at our door, which they seemed to treat as a private house, but it mattered little, for there was a guard only a yard and a half away. If we were really free men, why did they not send us to our Mission at Hsiao-chuang or Tienchiaching? The whole thing was incomprehensible. At the same time, our treatment was a little too polite, and, unfortunately, Chinese politeness means very little.

After luncheon we went out again. The sight of the mountains to the east was an almost irresistible temptation, and I said to my companions:

'Shall we try to escape?'

The judge had told us: 'Our prisoners are not kept under lock and key, but nobody thinks of escaping. Even if he tried, he would not go twenty *li* before he was recaptured.'

We returned to the house with conflicting opinions.

In the evening we had another talk with the old landlord, and learnt what the family—and the people as a whole—had to endure under the rule of the new masters.

16th July

I was awake all night, obsessed by the desire to escape. I suggested it again to my fellow prisoners. I explained, I expostulated, putting forward all the arguments in favour and demolishing all those against it. Their only reply was: 'We must wait and see what happens.'

About midday the judge came and set about his task with subtlety. He told us of the damage Japan had done to China, the tortures suffered by the people, the need for peace to enable them to live, the mutual recognition of values that should govern the nations.

'The world,' he said, 'should be one family and if you would help us, we Communists could achieve our ideal more easily—our ideal of universal well-being.'

We listened in silence, trying to understand the mind of this man who laughed and talked so freely.

Towards evening, when I was alone, some of the soldiers under his command came in. They stared and asked strange questions, to which my answer was that I was tired and sleepy. They went away disappointed, but were immediately succeeded by two others. In the hope of picking up some information, I pretended to be asleep. They

roused me with a kick and asked me some questions, which I ignored.

'He does not understand Chinese,' said one.

'Well, we must make him talk,' said the other.

Father Perottoni came in. While he was speaking to one of them, the other looked at our things, turning them over, throwing them about, reading them. Then he approached me and stood looking down at me with evil eyes. I still pretended to be asleep. He shook his head and went out, followed a moment later by the other.

'Who were they?' I asked.

Father Perottoni had no idea. Certainly they were not the usual type of merely inquisitive people.

After supper the judge came back and announced with joy that on the 18th July there would be a great demonstration at Hochien to show the arms, booty, and prisoners captured at Suiyeh, and invited us to be present! When he left we discussed this invitation, which greatly impressed us. Did they wish to show us off and then have us lynched by a mob incited by them? This was a favourite trick of theirs. We came to the conclusion that, after all, we could refuse to go. And if our refusal were badly received . . . ?

### *17th July*

Our servant, who still faithfully attended us, managed that morning to pick up some news about Suiyeh. On the 10th July it had been re-occupied by the Japanese, the Communists retiring to the mountains for safety. The Japanese had made sorties every day and had driven them some twenty-five *li* from the town, which reduced the distance we should have to travel if we escaped. We were relieved to learn that nothing had happened to the church. The dealers in black-market goods came and went freely in and out of Suiyeh, because they always travelled by night.

Once again I suggested escaping, and this time my idea was accepted. We decided to act as soon as possible. I wanted to damp down their sudden enthusiasm, engendered perhaps by excitement, because my feet were still very swollen, but I could not put forward such a poor excuse, so left it to Father Perottoni to choose the day. He answered:

'This very one!'

'To-night, then.'

So that our escape might be effected without any disasters, we decided that the servant would pretend to be ill and, with the excuse of wanting a mouthful of air, would station himself at the street door.

When he saw that everyone had gone to bed, we would very cautiously try to get out, first the servant, second Father Monti, third Father Perottoni, and myself last.

These plans were laid at four o'clock in the afternoon. How long and weary were those hours of waiting! A host of worries assailed us. A sense of oppression showed itself in sweating and made movement difficult. We felt that the whole world must know our designs. Every unexpected noise, anyone who came into the courtyard, made us feel that an unknown traitor was coming to arrest us. From time to time we managed to shake ourselves free of such fears, recollecting that our secret was shared only by the walls, which keep secrets better than the grave. We sat down, got up, walked about, talked; and each made his own petitions, begging the help of all souls in purgatory, the Madonna, the Saints. But one thought was uppermost in our minds: to-morrow we should be mountain birds.

During all that afternoon nobody came to disturb us. When supper time arrived, the stools and bowls burnt us and we ate hastily. We had some eggs and two bottles of wine for the Mass. We drank one and kept the other for our flight. We went to bed so as to give the impression that we were settling down for the night. The servant began to act his part and went out about eight o'clock, explaining to the sentry, who asked why he was in the street at that hour:

'I have malaria and want a little fresh air.'

About ten o'clock he came back to tell us that the street was deserted and no one astir. Father Perottoni and Father Monti, who had no black trousers, put on long Chinese tunics, tying them to their legs, while I donned a little black jacket belonging to the servant.

We waited for another half-hour so that Morpheus could come to our aid, then went into the courtyard. The silence was complete. Taking off our Chinese slippers, we got into the agreed order and slipped through the first courtyard, the loudest noise the beating of our hearts. We reached the second courtyard, where it was necessary to proceed with the greatest caution, only a little wall of earth separating us from the nearby hotel, where there were sure to be people sleeping out of doors. The smallest accident would have betrayed us. We stooped down as much as possible and crept across the second courtyard. Now it was only necessary to get through the door to the adjoining field of maize. The servant went first, followed by Father Perottoni, then Father Monti, but Father Perottoni, having got safely

through the door, stumbled over a stone. A loud shout echoed through the night!

My heart seemed to stop and I was bathed in sweat. I crouched down, trying to make myself as small as possible, and waited motionless, feeling crushed. Then came a second shout. Instinctively I grasped a brick and clasped it to me. A third shout in the distance came like a ray of light in the midst of a tempest. These were the sentries giving the password for the night. Thank God!

I got up and poked my head through the doorway. There was no one in the street. Three swift paces and I was in the maize-field, where the others were waiting. We re-formed and proceeded in silence, taking care to avoid the villages, where there were sentries day and night.

We walked for about two hours, nervousness and apprehension increasing our fatigue, but we plodded on. Helped by the light of the moon, we climbed down the rocky bank of a river and entered the water; I first with the servant, then the other two. We formed a chain in case of accidents and proceeded very carefully until, by the mercy of God, we reached the other side. The thought that this ford had been too easy had barely passed through my mind, when I missed my footing, fell into the water again, and was swept into a whirlpool. By good luck the current was very strong and the swirl of the water against a rock shot me out of the whirlpool. I climbed ashore, trembling with cold and reaction.

In front of us was a little hill. The moon had set and it was very dark. The sky was once again covered with clouds and I, acting as guide, could not see the north star. I lost my sense of direction and without a word I let the servant lead the way. The ascent was very tiring, but less so than the descent. A burning throat prevented me from breathing and at the same time destroyed any wish to go on. Father Perottoni fell several times and hurt his legs. The few eggs and the bottle of wine we had brought with us had all been broken. We started a second ascent, then a third; we had entered the mountains. We were panting, tired, and burning with thirst.

How many miles had we gone? Judging by the amount we had walked and by our fatigue, at least fifty. Already the eastern sky was beginning to grow red. We made a short stop and chose one of the summits before us as a hiding-place for the day. We climbed wearily and, by the time we reached our objective, day had come. The servant, by good scouting, found, between a rock and the side of the hill, a

hole in which there was a little putrid water. We climbed down and, undeterred by any hygienic considerations, drank the gift from God that we had found at so great cost. There was not much water, but sufficient to quench our thirst.

*18th July*

Day had come and it was essential to find somewhere to conceal ourselves. We climbed to the top of the hill again and discovered a little grassy depression, perhaps a trench dug by the 40th Army, and lay down in it. The sky became clear and the view was wonderful: on one side the impressive chain of the mountains of Shansi, on the other the smiling valley of Hsiaochuang, with its river. We managed to pick out the tomb of Monsignor Scarella. Therefore—a practical deduction—having walked all night, we had covered only some twenty *li*.

The sun rose, splendid and solemn. We tried to sleep, but its rays roasted us in our shallow frying-pan. By eleven o'clock we were sweating and thirsty, and could bear it no longer. In the fields below, men were digging and some shepherds with their sheep were wandering about among the little hills beside the river. Towards midday, when the heat was more intense and all the people had disappeared, we started off in the hope of finding some water—even a puddle. We climbed down the side of the hill, only to find another, even steeper escarpment. Father Monti could no longer keep up. I went back and managed to get him to the top, where there was a little reviving air. That effort was fatal to me. . . . The mountain air was insufficient to give us back our courage, and the sun burnt us pitilessly, our only protection being our towel. We wandered about the summit looking for a cave. The servant found one, but it was only big enough for two of us, so I made Father Monti and Father Perottini go into it, as they were suffering the most. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

If we did not find water within half an hour, we should die. Down below in the valley a peasant was working in the fields. I asked the servant to go down and beg him for some water. We had a few coins with us and I gave them to him to pay for it. Poor fellow, he, too, was burning with fever, but he staggered down and I saw him talking to the peasant. When he came back, I got up and went to meet him. My whole body felt on fire, and the instinctive act of swallowing was an agony. The servant's news deprived me of any lingering desire to live. The peasant could not give us any water. He was sorry, but such

was the surveillance that it was impossible for him to help us. Nobody could leave the village without a permit, and that was only valid for one day. To go back to the village would be fatal to him and to us fugitives. But, said the good peasant, there was a dirty pool for the animals on the other side of the village.

There was water—a simple but decisive fact. Death from thirst was certain, what might happen at the pool was uncertain, so we choose the lesser evil. We got up at once and set off towards life. Following the dry bed of a little stream that would undoubtedly lead us to the pool, we saw it through an arch of trees. Some unknown and strange power enabled us to reach it. The putrid, dark-green water seemed to us like the elixir of life. Dropping my little bundle, I threw myself down. . . . Oh, that water! A tiny girl, terrified by our appearance, scrambled out of the pool on the other side and fled sobbing, while two other girls stared at us, looking pale and frightened.

To avoid such indiscreet witnesses, we retreated and hid ourselves in a thicket beside a path that led up the mountain, and waited for the children to depart before we ventured back to the pool.

Barely twenty minutes later, three men appeared at the bottom of the path. They looked like *Kung-tso-yuan*—People's Commissars. We three priests lay down and pretended to be asleep, our heads covered by the towel. They came nearer . . . They stopped. One of them gave me a kick, which I answered with a snore.

'They are tired,' said the second.

'They are asleep,' said the third.

They went away. Holy souls in purgatory, what a fright!

Evening came. There was an old man working in the fields. With the utmost caution, we approached the pool and drank again. This time we really quenched our thirst and, feeling a little refreshed, started again up the hill. The sky was clear and the moon shone brightly. After a few steps we discovered that the ground was broken and covered with stones, and the path so steep that we could not take a step without slipping. A little way beneath us was the village. We prayed they would not hear us.

With God's help we got over this stretch of the path without any disaster, but below us, some fifty yards away, two men were moving. I immediately lay down and made the others do the same, saying:

'If they try to stop us, it is every man for himself.'

The men were talking, but they remained still. They lighted cigarettes. I had a penknife with me. Opening it violently, I muttered:

'Now come on, if you have the courage!'

But my better nature crushed this desire for blood.

Waiting became an agony. My eyes were fixed on those two most unwelcome human beings, and imagination multiplied them. I was bathed in sweat. I do not know how, or by means of what strange narcotic it was achieved, but one after the other we fell into a profound sleep.

I awoke suddenly. The moon was beginning to sink and the shadows were getting longer. I roused the others. The two men were still there, perhaps on guard for twenty-four hours. We must get away. We moved off one at a time very cautiously, but had hardly reached the trees before we began to run like madmen and were in danger of breaking our necks down some precipice. We descended towards the cultivated terraced land. The moon set behind the mountains and it was completely dark. The mountain ended and the terraces began. I wanted to go slowly, but my legs would not obey me. Thinking that I was stepping on something solid, I found, with terror, that I was stepping into a void. I tried to recover myself, but failed and crashed down. I do not know from what height I fell, but as I had time to draw a deep breath, I should think about twelve feet. Fortunately, the ground was under cultivation, or had at least been dug. For all that, I received such a blow on the back of my skull that, when I managed to stand up, my head was singing as if an accordion was being played inside it. Although it hurt me considerably, we went on.

Once over the terraces we were in the fields, where thirst and hunger warned us to stop. Dear mother earth, how kind and soft you seemed! To satisfy our thirst, we wandered about looking for pumpkins. We found five or six and, having devoured them, set off again up a little low hill. It would soon be dawn and it was essential to find somewhere to hide.

### *19th July*

The sky turned red and orange, the breeze was almost cold. It was not a suitable place to hide ourselves, but on the eastern side, above the cultivated land, there were some trees with branches that came down to the ground. They seemed a good refuge, even providing protection against the scorching rays of the sun, so we climbed down and concealed ourselves under them. Not very far from us a peasant was digging in a field. I sent the servant to ask him for some water

and a little bread if he had any. The servant came back empty-handed. The man knew about the missionaries of the Catholic Church and that they were good people. He advised us not to move and not to let ourselves be seen. If we wanted to drink, there was a little spring to our left, where the valley ended and the hill began.

It was eleven and our thirst was increasing. The pumpkins were finished and the heat was suffocating. I picked some persimmons from the trees and chewed them to get a little liquid; they were bitter and acid and dried up my mouth, set my teeth on edge, and seemed to cut my lips. At midday we went in search of the spring and of somewhere else to hide ourselves, because, however sympathetic the peasant might be, even he, I thought, had friends, and we could not be sure that he would be able to resist the temptation of saying what he had seen. There was not a living creature in the fields between us and the village. We went back to the cultivated land and up terrace after terrace, until we finally discovered the providential spring. We drank and went on up the mountain. We found a cave and hid in it. Time passed incredibly slowly. Now and again a shepherd went by, but, fortunately, did not look into the cave.

Towards evening, when the first shadows began, we came out of our retreat, went back to the spring and drank as much as we could in preparation for a long night march. We started off towards the north-east. It was the best night we had had, with no adventures, and we kept up a brisk pace. Even the hills were not so steep as on the previous nights. At midnight we stopped for a rest. We reached a wide plain, which was quite flat, crossed a dry river bed, and climbed a little hill covered with brambles and stones.

Up to then, we had had to contend only with the elements. Now there were the animals. Going up a terrace I put my hand on a rock to help myself, and an enormous scorpion stung me. I felt my heart stop, and I fell. I do not know how long I was unconscious. Intense cold aroused me from a torpor that seemed like sleep, a faint or death—perhaps all three together. My comrades were searching for me. I heard the voice of Father Monti.

'Poor Father Suigo! Who knows what will happen to him!'

Their heavy breathing spoke of great exhaustion.

'I . . . I . . .' But my whole being was shaken by a great sob. I made an effort and tried again. 'I am here!'

A moment later the four of us were reunited, our tragic thoughts turned suddenly to joy. We were very weak. Since starting, we had

eaten nothing but the pumpkins, but the longing to escape gave us courage, and supported our worn-out bodies. It was two o'clock in the morning and we must have come half-way. We felt that we knew those hills.

We set off again, driven by some strange instinct. We entered a little valley, which we crossed, then had to climb once more. But our strength was failing. Abandoning any hope of going on, we dragged ourselves by a supreme effort up to the top of one of the hills in search of cover.

In the east there was thunder and lightning. If the storm reached us, it would at least wash us and protect us from men. We could do no more and we dropped to the ground half dead, an enormous weight seeming to press down on us. All our senses refused to react; we had no control over our eyes, our ears, and a fatal feeling of well-being assailed us. Were we asleep? I seemed to see a church of immense height, with colossal arches, the pillars being mountains. A crowd of men, excited and frightened, filled the dark and menacing cathedral. From time to time, a brilliant light appeared at the end of the church and lighted up the great mass.

'It is the altar,' I thought. 'They are lighting the candles.'

The organ rang out. What was it playing? It sounded like the death-rattle of some enormous animal. A huge figure covered with a black veil arose. The crowd remained motionless.

'Where are the European dogs?' thundered a voice.

I felt death approaching. Why had I entered that building? Where was the exit? A terrifying murmur, like dogs growling, swept over the crowd. It was coming nearer. I wanted to fly, but I could not. A desperate effort—and I woke in a bath of sweat. Where was I? Was I alive or dead? I looked round still trembling from the horror of my dream.

The others were asleep. The sun had risen, but where was that barking coming from? I rose and looked up the hill. A little way off were two wolves making for us. As I roused my comrades with a shout and they got up very alarmed, another wolf appeared. I picked up a stone and threw it. The wolves gave a howl and, frightened perhaps by so many people, fled to the other side of the mountain. This victory cheered us up.

Another cry came from the bottom of the valley, but this was not the cry of a wolf, but of a man. It was necessary to find a hiding-place. Not very far away were some trees. I suggested taking shelter among

them, but Father Monti objected. We tumbled rather than walked down the hill and took refuge in a shepherd's cave.

*20th July*

We sent the servant in search of water, but he returned empty-handed. We ate half of a pumpkin we had found the night before. At about eight o'clock, Father Monti wanted to go out of the cave. I pointed out the danger, but he paid no attention.

We heard a boy shouting. The servant went out to see what was happening and saw the boy running towards the village. The incident worried me, but the others thought my fears were exaggerated. In half an hour we heard a rifle-shot and a shout.

'Who is in that cave? Come out!'

The servant went out. While they were asking him how many we were, I emerged, holding up my hands.

'Don't shoot!'

The others appeared from the cave. Two threatening men approached me, their revolvers pointed at my head. Rapidly they stripped us all to the skin. I protested that we were priests of the Catholic Church and that we lived at Suiyeh, but the revolvers were still at the ready. Then, while they were still tearing off our clothes, I said:

'Give us a little water.'

I spoke almost unconsciously, but this harmless request had the most unexpected result: the revolvers were put away.

I was very frightened. In the fields below, hidden among the rocks and the trees, innumerable rifles were aimed at us. Shouts and cruel laughter accompanied the degrading scene. In triumph we were led naked through the village, the name of which was Peichingshi.

An immense crowd gathered to stare at us. We were thrown into a pagoda, where a Communist chief came to interrogate us, then left without a word. Here we were for the second time at the mercy of our enemies. It was about two o'clock and we were exposed to the jeers of the crowd: passers-by asking us every kind of improper and menacing questions. We were helpless and therefore to be treated to the most disgusting insults.

In the middle of this crowd composed of faces of every kind and age, there was a young man staring at us and repeatedly making the sign of the cross. He was a Christian we knew, and he came over to tell us that we should keep calm because his brother was the chief of the district. Thank heaven!

For the delight of the public, they took us on the platform where the plays were acted. A Communist would not allow us to sit down because he wished everyone to see us. It was no good poking us with bayonets; my swollen, wounded feet would not hold me up, and I fell frequently under the blows. When they asked me to speak, I refused. Father Perottoni agreed and explained about the Church, the priests and what the priests had done at Suiyeh to protect the people during the Japanese invasion. The crowd listened in silence, and very soon showed their sympathy and pity for us.

This enraged the Communists, who, seeing the impression he was making on his hearers, told Father Perottoni to be silent, giving him a violent push. One of them explained that we had escaped from prison, and added a torrent of abuse, but the crowd was not sympathetic. Put to shame, the Communists led us back. The thunderstorm that had been threatening all the afternoon became worse, but it did not rain. My dream of the previous night had come true. What else would happen before we died?

They took us off to the head of the district, the brother of our Christian friend. Oh, the shame of that walk! And the suffering! The bones were coming through the soles of my feet.

The head of the district was away. His deputy sent a message to the mandarin, asking how he was to behave. After supper, we retired to the hole they had prepared for us and thanked God that nothing worse had happened to us.

### *21st July*

When we got up, the sun was already shining. About ten o'clock a man came in. He was proud and quarrelsome. With exaggerated dignity he began to call us merchants, oppressors of the people, stirrers-up of trouble, filthy dogs, and the like. I answered with equal passion, then Father Perottoni flung himself into the discussion. It was two to one and he went away, begging our pardon.

We found out that we were lodged in a house that was beside the prisons. About midday they set up a court for two women, on what charge we did not know. Poor prisoners, at the mercy of two or three youths!

At five they invited us to dinner: a little bean soup and some bread. With a raging fever, I could not eat. I threw myself down on the plank bed, hoping for death.

## CHAPTER

# 3

*22nd July 1945*

**A**t midday the messenger returned with orders to take us back at once to Putihsiaochuang. They saddled a donkey for anyone not able to walk; I was the first to mount it. We were accompanied by the scoundrel who had caused all the trouble yesterday. He seemed an entirely different person and talked like a Benedictine. What liars they were!

After passing through several villages, we reached the gorges and saw again the pickets who had cost us so much sweat and anxiety. It was very bitter to think of the outcome of so many sacrifices, and still worse to be ignorant of the end of this interlude in our imprisonment. What would they think of our escape? Would they accept our apologies? In every village, we were greeted with the jeers and threats of the inhabitants.

We entered the little valley of Linhsien. It had just rained and the roads were almost impassable. The donkey walked where it liked and how it liked, to my great annoyance. At a certain point, where the road ran between two massive stone walls, it got frightened and began to gallop, almost scraping along the left-hand wall. A large stone was sticking out, and, before I could do anything, the animal cannoned against it, and my left leg was struck a heavy blow. This fresh pain wiped out the anxiety about the place to which we were being taken.

Night fell, the silence broken by a melancholy dirge and discordant laughter. A group of people were lying on the ground at the edge of the fields. They were silent as we passed, then a woman's coarse laugh struck a chord in my memory. It was the disgraceful woman we had seen in the mandarin's office some days before. There was a general laugh in answer to hers.

'They've caught them,' she said.

As soon as we entered the village of Shanchuang, they made us halt.

The news of our capture had spread, and employees and soldiers came out, but nobody said anything. While we were waiting, it was difficult to conceal our apprehension. During that grim pause, Father Perottoni decided what to do.

'If nobody is going to speak,' he said to us, 'I will.'

Just then the mandarin's secretary emerged.

'So you've come back,' he said with a mocking smile.

Father Perottoni made our excuses and explained the reason for our conduct. The secretary replied drily and rudely, ending with the ominous observation:

'Who is not with us is unworthy to live.'

Six armed men then appeared and took us to a pagoda. These walls, I thought, might see our last moments. This brought me happiness and I prepared to die. They gave us a little water and some bread, which I did not eat; I had too much else to think about. Then they made us get up:

'Follow us.'

They were the last words I heard distinctly as we set off for Puti-hsiaochuang.

I woke as if from a drugged sleep and found myself opposite to the door through which we had escaped a few days before, and a few minutes later we were back in our old dog-kennel. It was the end of our dream of freedom.

I lay down on the filthy and smelly mat, and thought sadly that I was the cause of so much suffering to all four of us. To-day, perhaps, we should be condemned to death.

### *23rd July*

At nine o'clock we received a visit from the judge. In that face, as mysterious as death itself, we might read our sentence. We begged his pardon for having offended him. 'He was so good.' He only smiled enigmatically at us. He said that, knowing Communist law, we had run a useless risk, because the territory they occupied was watched by guards day and night, and those taken without a permit were in danger of finding themselves in serious trouble. Then he became very civil, saying he would tell the soldiers to return everything they had taken from us. Finally he went away. His visit encouraged us.

We found out what had happened after our escape. During the first day nobody had taken any interest, being busy with preparations for the great demonstration at Hochien. The owners of the house had

then told of our disappearance to the judge, who thought that we had gone to the Christian village of Tienchiaching. He sent someone to find out, and then discovered that we had tricked him.

After dinner they brought us some of our possessions.

The fever caused by the wounds in my feet and the pain in my left leg forced me to lie down on the bed, which was full of fleas and bugs. A man came in whom I did not know. He asked me who I was, where I lived, what I did, looked about, stared at me, and then departed.

That evening ten armed men camped in the room opposite ours, some sleeping in the courtyard. They did not speak to us, but evidently they were there for some reason. We were the reason.

*24th July*

Another visit from the judge, who began his propaganda again, having had to abandon it when we escaped. He involved himself in so many ridiculous arguments and exaggerations, and what he said was so obvious, that the aversion one usually feels for a liar gave way almost involuntarily to pity. The last impression he left on our minds was that perhaps even he did not believe what he had said!

The fear that our escape had brought trouble on the Christians at Tienchiaching gave us no peace, and shortly after the departure of the judge, Father Perottoni and Father Monti went out in the hope of finding a Christian. A tall thin man, very poorly dressed, with a good face, ventured to whisper: 'Shenfu!' ('Father!')

No words were necessary to show that he was a Christian, and, overcome by emotion, he knelt down and showed his joy and sorrow by crying bitterly. They comforted him and begged him to tell the other Christians at Tienchiaching the tragic story of our escape, and not to show himself near our prison for some days. Our escape did not seem to have caused any reprisals. The three parted with the arrangement to see each other on the same path every day at the same hour.

After dinner the judge put in another appearance, and discoursed on the misery of the people and the lack of hygiene. Cunning as a wolf, he remarked:

'You are very learned. You must help in this matter.'

We answered that we did not understand, and, feeling the moment favourable, said,

'Can the Christians come to see us?'

'Of course,' he answered. 'We are friends and the Christians are your friends. Naturally they can come.'

We felt we had been granted a great favour. We asked for another: 'Can the servant go freely to Hochien to buy vegetables?'

'Yes, yes,' he replied.

This was a good beginning: the Christians could come and the servant could go and buy vegetables. That meant he could go to the market and find someone who came from Suiyeh and could give us news of our Christians there.

So much kindness worried me. Either he wanted something from us—'You must help us,' he had said—or he was allowing the Christians to visit us only so that he could identify them and deal with them at an opportune moment. Personally I was very loath to believe in his sincerity. 'Perhaps,' I wrote, 'the state of my health makes me unjustifiably pessimistic. Perhaps the roses will flower.'

*25th July*

By night the room opposite to us was a brothel; by day it changed into a village school. The confusion of the boys and the ignorance of the masters, busy about very different things, made it a model Communist school.

That morning the judge did not appear. Father Perottoni and Father Monti went out in search of news to the rendezvous arranged yesterday. They found some Christians there and, trusting the judge's word, told them to come freely to the prison; and so that they should know the way, one of them came back with the two Fathers. He gave us news of the countryside, deeply moved by the appalling severities and suffering he had to describe. He promised to send others to see us on the morrow.

The servant came back from the market. He had seen someone from Suiyeh, where it seemed things were quite peaceful.

After dinner the judge came in with his secretary, and gave us very disquieting news. According to him, Changte had fallen into the hands of the Communists. The only means of communication between Kaifeng and Peking was the railway, the rest of the district being in their hands. Perhaps our congratulations were a little awkward because they were so insincere. We knew in our hearts what the Catholic priests must be suffering, if what he said was true. He then started again on his favourite topic, and made us understand, after the fashion of the Chinese, that it could be a blessing if there were a hospital. I

was afraid that he knew we had had a dispensary at Suiyeh and wanted to make us enthusiastic about his project. How was it possible to explain in any other way the change of attitude towards us? More than once we were to have been hanged. The perfect Communist method is to be silent, to by-pass a subject, to concede everything without asking for anything. Then, at the suitable moment, not to do what they wanted became the inexcusable crime, and might cost the victim very dear. We were most undecided whether to help him or not.

*26th July*

The pain in my leg was unbearable. The fever, the bites of bugs, lice, mosquitoes, fleas and all the rest of the animals within those four walls, began to have their effect: on the upper part of my left leg I had an enormous blue swelling.

Two men came in at nine o'clock. They were dressed like peasants, but their appearance and way of speaking showed that they belonged to a different class. They spoke to me politely and sat down. Limping and leaning on my inevitable stick, I went in search of some cigarettes. They asked me why I was lame and I told them my story. One of them demanded brusquely: 'Why did you escape?'

I tried to explain. They smiled and one added:

'You escaped for one of two reasons: either because you are opposed to Communism and were afraid, or else, being a European, accustomed to your comforts, you despise the food we eat in the *Pa Lu* and this bad accommodation. Is that true or not?'

I tried to vindicate myself. They interrupted me with:

'It's not worth talking about. You've come back, and we Communists are able to forget, provided . . .'

I asked if I could say a word in my own defence.

'No. To-day you must listen. There's always time to discuss your excuses.'

I felt that perhaps it would be better to listen and try to understand the implications of what they said. Their answers to probing questions, or their failure to answer, might provide me with some useful information. They talked, and while they talked the evil and false smiles on their faces seemed to crush me. It was an effort to react. The lecture was on certain Communist principles, and was followed by a denunciation of the unjustifiable hatred of the Church for Communism. I remember clearly having said 'yes' once and 'no' twice,

which perhaps amounted to dissent, because these two unwelcome visitors ended their lesson with the words:

'But even you will have to change your opinion about Communism.'

'I shall be ready to do so,' I replied, 'if you can convince me that I am wrong.'

They exchanged some words in Chinese, their accent quite different from that of the neighbourhood, then left me.

My physical suffering and the strain of this interview forced me to throw myself on my bed with a feeling of rebellion against having to submit to such insults. I longed to be given the opportunity to reply to all these myths about Communism, and about the hatred of the Church. 'Perhaps,' I wrote, 'the curtain has risen on the first act, which begins with the concessions of the good judge (poor man), then goes on with the exhibition of the hateful realities of Communism in their most brutal manifestations.'

After dinner, and still under the influence of the impression these men had made on me, I went out leaning on my stick, and managed to get as far as the first trees. Before me was the fertile countryside and at the end of the valley, framed in trees, rose the tomb of Monsignor Scarella. I sat down overwhelmed with longing to ask our dead bishop just one question. But what question? I did not know.

*27th July*

I got up for a few minutes and then went back to bed. For lack of a doctor, the judge, with true Communist kindness, had sent for a goatherd to come and treat my leg. This worthy remarked:

'You have dislocated something. To get it back into place, you must do exercises and walk as much as you can.'

I felt nothing but bitter contempt and smiled ironically. Later I wrote:

'To all the external sufferings, I must add this: I see that I am becoming less and less master of myself. I think that I can no longer react for fear of the consequences, and I know how the Communists welcome such a frame of mind in their victims, so as to get them into their diabolical clutches.'

It was a quiet morning with no tiresome visitors. I went out for a little in the sun, but did not succeed in recovering my self-control. During the afternoon, one of the judge's soldiers came in and sat down on Father Monti's bed, showing an uncontrollable desire to

chatter. I did not say a word. He asked me questions, to which I answered 'yes' or 'no' when necessary, and tried to stop him. His maliciousness, his suspiciousness and his ignorance became more and more obvious, owing to his stupidity. It was a marvel to me how he was able to say his lesson—now insinuating and gay, now simple and timid, then attacking the enemies of his country.

'However,' he added, 'we regard the Japanese as our brothers, because we know that the people did not want war. It is their chiefs who send the people to their deaths.'

I nodded. Despite my silence, he would not give up and started on more questions. I answered in rather difficult Chinese in the hope that he would not understand and would go away. Instead he demanded an explanation of every sentence! I was between two fires and my patience threatened to give out.

'I will answer you to-morrow, Now I have fever and don't want to talk.'

He still would not give up. Finally Father Perottoni came in and rescued me, but the man had got his second wind and he attacked this new victim. What patience and good temper were required when all one wanted was to give him a resounding slap in the face! But we were in their hands and we had to put up with him. If it was like that to-day, what would it be like to-morrow? Perhaps worse—and if this life were to go on for one, two, three months, a year? The thought of a God Who sees all our troubles and feels compassion for us gave us courage. We knew that only He could help us.

In the evening it rained, and the singing of the prisoners brought to an end this sad day.

#### *28th-29th July*

Several days had passed since we had been recaptured. Believing that we should be here for some time, we asked the judge for permission to send our servant to Suiyeh for the sacred vessels and vestments necessary for the celebration of Mass. He made no objection and readily wrote out a permit. I thought it was the beginning of some underhand game, and I was right. This was the judge's first move.

The servant was to leave next day and we took the opportunity to write to our brethren, which was a great comfort to us. What I wrote was a mixture of hopes, joys and fears. We advised the servant to bring back with him the schoolmaster, who had been alone in the Mission.

Some Christians arrived from Tienchiaching and told us what the people suffered under the new 'liberators.'

The heat was suffocating and I limped out to try and find a little fresh air. I met the judge's secretary, who belonged to a rich family and was compelled by the Communists to work for the new order. One saw how he hated his work and how his master despised him. Timid by nature, he did not show much enthusiasm for his new creed. We asked him what the Communist intentions were with regard to us. He said he knew nothing. We assured him that if he told us we would never betray him. He declared that he really knew nothing.

'As far as I can gather,' he said to me, frightened and trembling, 'they do not mean to do you any harm. You must do something for them.'

Poor little man, he had not inherited much courage from his illustrious ancestors.

That evening we had another visit from the judge. He brought us a Communist newspaper, on the front page of which was great praise of 'our friend, America,' news of the triumphs of the Communist army in China, and accounts of the order and well-being that reigned in the occupied territory.

'News,' remarked a Christian bitterly, 'suited to women and children.'

The servant started before sunrise, and 'went not our hearts with him?' I could not hide a feeling of envy, but life teaches us self-denial, and it was necessary to think of the future, of the possibility of a complete change in the Cominunist behaviour towards us, which might demand the greatest of all sacrifices—the sacrifice of life itself.

That day the judge's lesson was even more pointed. As cunning as only an old Communist could be, he tried to prove his theories by inventing facts. He knew, of course, that if he were to discuss abstract principles, the evident and nauseating repulsiveness of his mistaken philosophy would be only too apparent. He told us instead of the energy shown by the government in the rehabilitation of agriculture, in the breeding of animals, in the assistance given to workers and peasants, etc. He spoke of the sacred law that made work an obligation for all, from the highest to the lowest, from the learned and the ignorant, and so on. How different this was from the facts that we learned from the Christians who came to see us. A poor peasant

found eating food a little better than usual was punished; anyone who wore clothes less threadbare than the others was tried as a rich landowner.



Communism creates confusion in the organization of society, darkens it with satanic fury and turns it into a blood-bath. The Communist community is only the usual collection of brigands under a new name. Under the new regime, men and things have to submit to an iron discipline. At the centre of the constellation there is a great planet surrounded by a world of satellites, whose existence is subordinate to the will and evil desires of the great leader. It is a double game: to satisfy the insatiable hunger of the *élite* by means of the blood and sacrifices of the people. This macabre dance is naturally masked by hypocritical sentimentalism, and made more hateful by the nature and character of eastern peoples.

'We pity the people. . . We want to save the people. . . Only in Communism will the people find real happiness. . . Our duty is to work and sacrifice ourselves for the people. . . The people make the laws. . . The will of the people is sacred and inviolable.'

The Communist legal code is permeated with these expressions of humanity and kindness, behind which display of mawkish tenderness is the terrifying reality of a people who live with ropes round their necks. The proverbial phrase, 'the dance of death,' has under Communism a sinister realism.

Let us lift a corner of the veil and take a glance. The principal weapon for the reconstruction of society is the People's Court. The hero who controls this weapon is the *Kung-tso-yuan*, the People's Commissar. The success of the Court and therefore its fruits, depend on the natural or acquired wickedness of that official. The Communist legal code, except in certain matters—as, for example, free love—appears to provide the foundation for an incomparable social structure. However, the ability and the astuteness of the *Kung-tso-yuan* are shown in his unfailing power to combine legality with crime. I heard of a practical example during those days.

A Christian sold cigarettes and was admired for his preparation of the tobacco. His ability naturally enabled him to earn an honest living, and even the law was on his side. The Communists, whom nothing escapes, watched him carefully, until one day they decided to exterminate him. A Court was called and lasted for two days.

'Confess your sin,' shouted the Communists. 'You with your tobacco have robbed the people.'

Under torture the victim confessed his 'sin' and died eating a kilo of tobacco administered to him by his son. Do not think that he was a bad son. The Communists, to make the tragedy more horrible, very often compel members of his own family to torture the victim.

The people see and take heed, and terror forces them to commit similar crimes.

Everyone sees the difference between the sacred Communist law as laid down and as practised, and are not slow to realize the deception. Many try to find a middle way by satisfying the devouring greed of some chief. Occasionally this succeeds, but anxiety and the fear of being deceived cause so much anguish that suicide or flight seem to be the only way of release. What bitter irony! Others, driven by the same fear, take all their possessions to the man in power, in the hope that such a freewill offering will save them from a fate they had never envisaged. Others throw themselves unconditionally into the arms of the tyrants. Their sins are forgiven—but not forgotten—and they must pay for their 'pardon.'

In this uncertainty, moral and physical, capable of destroying the fibre of the strongest, the poor wretch succumbs.

The Communists, who have prepared for and waited patiently for such a collapse, now find themselves in possession of a valuable recruit and force him into a life of crime. The most dangerous spies, the most zealous propagandists, the most devoted Party members come from this class. They are not Communists, often indeed they detest Communism, which has forced them onto this fatal and perilous slope; they hate themselves and other men and their surroundings, as they slide down into the abyss.

The results are appalling.

Terror dominates the villages and the districts, and the victims fall, as a Chinese said to me, 'like grains of millet under violent blows from a stick.' All because in Communism the 'people will find real happiness.'

But there are other aspects even more tragic—things even more atrocious than those described in this book. Only those who have seen them can believe them.

One day I dared to ask a leading Communist for an explanation of the difference between the Communist legal code and the cruel enforcement of its provisions. He replied:

'The law is a dead thing. We act according to circumstances. The law will serve? We carry it out. The law will not serve? We ignore it. The people are an ignorant rabble. To overcome their ignorance, we must reduce them to such a condition of fright and terror that they do not understand anything. Most of them yield, but those who resist become the chosen soil to receive and give life to our principles. And we obtain this result by means of commissars and People's Courts, which seem to you so cruel.'

Here is an instance.

Not very far from the village where we were in custody, a People's Court was held. Nobody knew who had been chosen as the victim, so everyone was afraid. The *Kung-tso-yuan*, who wanted to find a victim at all costs, so as to enliven the proceedings, found himself confronted by an obstinate crowd, everyone remaining silent. But he possessed a persuasive and formidable weapon: he forced the people to remain quite still . . . 'to meditate . . . to think . . . to discover some crime, some injustice to be avenged.' Three days and two nights went by. On the third day the starving babies, the women frightened by this show of power, the men with their sunken eyes, all gave the impression of a gang of assassins waiting for the end. 'Hold firm till the people yield!' And the people must give way. Two old men agreed between themselves, and one of them held up his hand:

'This relative of mine robbed me of an egg ten years ago.'

The innocent lie was welcomed with a sardonic smile by the *Kung-tso-yuan*.

'Come here, you two. Ten years ago, this egg would have produced a chicken, that chicken would have laid eggs and therefore produced other hens.'

And the cunning scoundrel proceeded to demonstrate to the old man the evil done by his wicked action years ago.

The conclusion? He was stripped of all he possessed and condemned to be roasted alive because he held out for three days before telling the 'truth.' And all this 'so that the people may become the chosen soil capable of giving life to Communist principles.'

These things compel us to think, even if our minds shrink from such horrors. These brief parentheses inserted from time to time, are the links connecting the acts of this enormous tragedy.

That is the law under Communism.

*30th July*

The night was more horrible than ever. The whole race of animals in that wonderful palace of ours attacked us even more savagely than before. The heat, the dirt, the stench were so terrible that they prevented us from sleeping. The pain in my leg got worse and the swelling throbbed with an unceasing rhythm. ‘Night is a bad counsellor.’ I have proved the truth of this proverb. I thought of nothing but the swelling and decided it must be of the most dangerous kind. A war went on in my head, the winning thought being, ‘We have been for a month in the hands of these gentry. Where have I slept? What kind of food have I eaten? It was cooked, but how about the bowls and saucepans, those bowls that everybody’s hands and lips have touched?’

I had not finished this mental review when two or three scorpions fell from the ceiling with a bang. One landed on Father Monti’s neck. Half asleep, feeling something on him, he instinctively moved his hand and the scorpion reacted by stinging him in the neck. With a good deal of trouble, he succeeded in lighting the lamp to search for the attacker, but it had disappeared. We got up and staggered about like three drunken men.

At eight o’clock my two companions went off to Hsiaochuang, the first headquarters of the Mission. There were no incidents, perhaps because no one expected such important visitors. The situation was easier to imagine than to describe. Even the tomb of Monsignor Scarella had been violated by the Communists, who hoped to find treasure in it. The Bishop’s bones were collected by the Christians and buried in a place unknown to the violators. In the old seminary the Communists, among other things, were teaching women ‘humility’—that is to say, girls and brides under twenty-three.

It is no good to describe the impression made on the Christians by the appearance of the priests. The little place was too well known for the Communists not to take an interest. For some time, indeed, it had been the starting-point for the campaign against the Church, ‘the Italian devils’ and the Christians, ‘that gang of traitors.’

My colleagues returned in the afternoon, and we hoped that their visit would not increase the persecution of the poor people at Hsiaochuang.

*31st July*

I was alone in the house. Two men came in whom I thought I had seen before. They did not speak. I greeted them, but they did not

seem to hear me, so I remained silent. Finally they asked me if I was cured, In answer I showed them my leg, saying:

'Perhaps an operation will be necessary.'

I did not mean to say anything more, but the words escaped me:

'If you would let me go to Changte . . .'

They laughed, and asked me if I knew the Pope, Monsignor Zanin (the Apostolic Delegate) and others. 'What is that Zanin doing in China and all the other priests?'

'Teaching the Catholic religion,' I replied.

'Impossible! Religion is a palliative, and we know what you are doing here.'

There followed a denunciation of the Church, the Pope, and so on.

'If in 1900 your Pope had not sent arms to Peking, not one of you European curs would have been saved. And after your shameful victories, you stole our territories and you compelled my government to pay an enormous sum of money, and we know where that money is. The day is coming when my people will try you for your crimes. By your commerce and your cunning, you have taken everything of value out of the country. You forced our people to be slaves in your luxurious houses. Your schools are infamous places. Your Missions and your houses you have stolen from our people. Your followers are all traitors.'

I tried to answer them, to interrupt them, but it was impossible. For two hours I had to submit to this abuse. They then informed me that they would have more to say to me and more questions that I must answer. I could not help suspecting that they hurled the questions and arguments at me with the object of making me lose my temper, and had I given the wrong answers, would use them to build up a case against me.

The two priests returned and I told them of my suspicions. We were worried and filled with misgivings. It seemed impossible that the happiness of the last two days could have lasted such a short time. We waited for the next day to see what they would say and how we should reply.

#### *1st August. Saint's Day: St. Peter in Bonds*

If only an angel would come and release us! We were all waiting for something to happen. Would those two blackguards of yesterday return? During the night, I had thought of what I would say; I felt calm and wanted to be able to speak clearly with whoever came to argue.

But our visitors were the judge and his secretary, apparently with something important to say, for even the schoolboys were kept quiet. We sat down, then the judge made his secretary read out a document while he provided a running commentary. The other leading Communists had laid down the rules for the treatment of prisoners. We Italians would be tried.

'When will it take place?' I asked.

The judge smiled, but remained silent.

'If you like,' I said, smiling too, 'we are ready to-day.'

I did not know what impression my words made. The man was so subtle and malignant. When the reading came to an end he said:

'There is no need to try you. We are all good men who work for the good of the people.'

This climax struck us dumb with astonishment.

We did not see yesterday's rascals. Perhaps the judge wanted to pour a little water on the flames. The comedy had started and would play itself out to some unknown conclusion, the actors: the judge who talked of pity, the visitors who talked the crude reality of Communism.

It rained in the evening. A fine-looking old man came to see us. He had been the richest man in the neighbourhood, a relative of the owner of the house. Although he was under suspicion and frightened (and who would not be on those moonlight nights?), this good fellow saw in us the victims, as he had been, of unjust hatred, and so he was able to speak to us freely and to give vent to his unhappiness.

'My greatest sin,' he said, 'was that I inherited some property. I have been tried several times for this offence. I was beaten until I declared that my possessions were the result of illegal transactions. They made me head of the district in the hope that my conduct would provide them with some reason for punishing me. I was dismissed, I do not know why. My house is regarded as public property. People come day and night to spy, to criticize, to threaten. . . . What a terrible devil he must be who controls these new bandits. My wife has made so many sacrifices and so many promises, but she cannot placate him. Lao-T'ien-Yeh<sup>1</sup> has decided my fate. Sooner or later, I shall fall.'

He bent his head, overcome more by misery than by age, and gave a sigh like one wrung from a giant trying to move a mountain. He asked us if even in Italy there were these 'scoundrels.'

<sup>1</sup> 'The Old Grandfather in the Sky,' a characteristic expression that, for the Chinese, gives the exact idea of God.

We tried to comfort him.

'I know,' he said, 'that you are good men. That is why the Communists hate you. I know that your God is not afraid of these rascals.'

He got up as if suddenly frightened, begging our pardon for having disturbed us and beseeching us not to mention his visit to anyone. Poor old fellow, they had left him just enough to keep him alive.

I went to bed, but could not sleep, prey to internal and external battles.

*2nd August*

About eight o'clock two other unknown men came to visit us. The sky was clear and I was sitting in the sun in the courtyard. They made a sign asking me to go indoors. I held a hurried mental review and recalled the arguments I had prepared for yesterday. With an effort I got up the four worn stone steps. As usual I remained standing until they should invite me to sit down. They too remained standing.

They began with a word of commiseration for our condition. I replied that priests were accustomed to sacrifices. I tried to explain to them why we were in China, our plan for evangelization, and our everyday life. They asked me some questions about our resources, who provided the money, our property, etc. I explained that our funds came from the Bishop and from the freewill offerings of Christians. They enquired how many Christians there were in Suiyeh, how many schools, what we ate, how we were treated by the Japanese, what I thought of them, of the regular Chinese Government, of the Communists, whether I received letters from Italy. They encouraged me to write freely to Italy; they would see that the letters went. I thanked them, knowing full well that I should never write, because before two days had elapsed I should see a translation of the letter in a newspaper, with such comments as they chose to make. They asked me if I had been frightened when the Communists took Suiyeh.

'No,' I replied. 'We devote our lives to our converts and our religion. We do not mind danger.'

They asked me if I was a doctor. I answered, 'No.'

'Who was in charge of the hospital at Suiyeh?'

'It was not a hospital; it was a little dispensary.'

In order to avoid the necessity of having to say that I had been in charge of the dispensary, I began to talk of the misery of the people, of the dirt, etc. Most fortunately Father Perottoni and Father Monti arrived. It was nearly eleven and I was tired. The visitors returned to

the question of the dispensary. Father Perottoni answered that we were not doctors. The shrewd Communists saw that we disliked the subject and talked of something else.

After dinner, to my great content, I slept till five p.m. It was an uneasy sleep, full of strange dreams, but I awoke refreshed and feeling the benefits of four hours' sleep. In the evening, the *Min Ping* arrived as usual, but in far greater numbers. They were whispering among themselves. What military enterprise was pending?

*3rd August*

We saw no one during the morning. Father Perottoni and Father Monti went for their usual walk; they saw and spoke to the once rich old man who had been to visit us a few days before. The news did not seem too good. The Communists were advancing towards the railway. They did not dare to attack the Japanese posts, but were ready in case those were evacuated. The Red occupation of the zone was inevitable.

Two old catechists from Hsiaochuang came to see us in the afternoon. Two poor old women who had never been married, they had said that they were widows (among the Communists, everyone has to be married, regardless of his or her feelings or wishes), but would this innocent subterfuge be successful? They were afraid that the non-Christians and the dregs of the population would betray them at any moment. To practise their faith, they had made the greatest sacrifices. They wept, and my heart rebelled. Was this the 'liberty' preached by the Communists?

The visit of the priests to Hsiaochuang had caused various reactions. The decent people had welcomed the visit and hoped that very soon we and they would be free. The evildoers dreaded our return. They were very angry and after secret discussions had decided to go to the mandarin and demand an explanation. They knew that we were prisoners and could not understand why we were allowed to move about. When it comes to destruction or massacre, the lowest elements in the population enjoy absolute power.

'Why,' they had asked the mandarin, 'do you not bury these European devils alive?'

The old women's report made us both angry and afraid. When they were going away, they looked like corpses.

'What will happen to them,' I wrote, 'if it is discovered that they dared to come and see us. Please God, save them and China!'

Last night there were more discussions among the *Min Ping*, this time the *Erh T'ung Chüni* taking part. The Communist schoolmaster spoke, reiterating the rules for the protection of the district, and, at the end of every sentence, asking them if they understood. He finished by saying:

'I have spoken to you very clearly about your duty. Anyone who is caught not carrying out orders will be punished. Do you understand?'

They all said 'yes.' The leader of these miserable little creatures got up. If one had heard, without seeing him, this boy of not more than thirteen, one would have said that he was a man very conscious of his power. He allocated his followers to their different posts and emphasized again the laws that governed their corps. There was a whistle, a word of command, and all marched off in military formation.

All this astonished us. It seemed unbelievable that this secret and evil power, which manifested itself in deeds of terror, should have succeeded in attaching to itself these young things so that each understood his special task and responsibility, and acted in a way worthy of a better cause.

The district, the roads, the cross-roads, even the paths leading to the mountains, are under the surveillance of these young Communist forces. Anyone who travels, even the mandarin or a more important person, must show a permit, saying where he comes from and if asked, how much money he has on him. Permission to proceed depends on the goodwill of the boys. The least suspicion, an indiscreet remark, an unwise smile, anything that annoys them, will be dearly paid for. Anyone who fails to satisfy them is surrounded by these little curs. It is useless to try to run away, for they clutch a person's legs, jump on his back, and shout for the head of the *Min Ping* who must always be ready with some armed men. The unfortunate prisoner is taken to the village and tried by the same boys. The trial is terrifying, such is their arrogance and their natural ignorance and incompetence, and yet they decide whether he shall be condemned or pardoned. At the end of the trial the leader asks: 'What sentence shall we give?' If one says, 'Bury him alive,' the unfortunate man is lost. Such is Communist education.

<sup>1</sup> The Children's Army, an organization of militarized boys for the protection of the district and the roads.

It was one of these boys who discovered us during our escape, and many like us must have had grim experiences at their hands.

All these movements, changes and the increasing watch on the countryside, made us tremble with a mixture of joy and apprehension. If the Japanese or anyone else defeated the Communists, what would happen to us? Was there any significance in the fact that some Christians were not allowed to come and see us, and that it was apparently the judge himself who had sent them away? 'God protect us,' I wrote.

## CHAPTER

# 4

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THE *Erh T'ung Chün* is the first of the Communist organizations, both in time and importance. All boys from seven or eight must belong to it and none is exempted for any reason whatever. The leader is chosen by the boys themselves, and as an organization it comes under the direct control of the *Kung-tso-yuan*.<sup>1</sup> The head of the district, the head of the *Min Ping* and, if there is a school in the village, the schoolmaster, can and often must, in the absence of the *Kung-tso-yuan*, take charge of the boys and see that they carry out their duties.

To understand the degree of divergence achieved by Communism in this matter, and its responsibility for the many crimes committed by boys, it is necessary to recall the traditional, and I think natural, Chinese attitude: the great respect due from children to their elders—respect that is, as it were, a corollary of filial piety. Often it is accompanied by a fear of having offended an adult, who might curse the child—and the Chinese fear a curse. I have often assisted at lively little scenes in which adults who have been insulted, or think they have been insulted, by some boyish fun stop unexpectedly, give one look, utter two words, and the boys hide behind a door, or run like so many little hares into a field of corn.

Under Communism all this has been reversed, and in addition the boys have become dangerous little tyrants and the adults must submit to their wicked whims.

In the early days of Communist expansion, the boys had important work to do: the surveillance of strangers coming from the Japanese zone. At critical moments, this was carried on in all the villages along the demarcation line and in vulnerable spots where it was not possible to create the political organization that existed in the interior. In addition it was useful to confuse people's minds by talking of patriotism

<sup>1</sup> People's Commissar, working under the Political Commissar.

and the fear of the enemy: 'We must defend our country at any cost. Everyone must be a soldier. Down with the Japanese who have come to steal our land and massacre our people! Death to traitors, the jackals of the Japanese who enter our territory!' Words like these one saw in immense letters on the walls of every village, and they were repeated over and over again. The practical application of these slogans was: 'Everyone must help, even the children.'

Among those who took this propaganda most seriously were the boys themselves. Given the novelty and the strangeness of being flattered (and the Communists are past masters in the art of flattery) the boys took the task allotted to them most seriously. Before my imprisonment, all the Christians in the Communist zone used to say:

'It seems impossible that the children should be so quick when they are on guard in the village and on the roads, and sometimes they are so sleepy when they have to work. It is raining, it is cold, it is hot, but when it comes to their turn they are ready. They even leave their food. See how serious they are when they stop people and how they work out a strategic plan for keeping watch, so as to help in case of need.'

There were stories that I did not at first believe, but very soon I had similar experiences—and very unpleasant they were—during the short visits I paid to the villages in the Communist zone.

At the beginning, the Communists appeared to give the boys very little instruction; they taught them their duties and at the same time the boys learned that they were free to go where they liked, and that they were the absolute masters of the situation. The organization had no arms, then suddenly permission was given for them to carry sticks and the lances with which the country people used to defend themselves against brigands. Instead of arms, the Communists depended on strategy, which was intended not for the protection of the country, which did not need protection, but for the control of roads that were dangerous because they were so far from the village.

China is very densely populated. In our corner of the Honan province, as a result of the fertility of the soil, the population is so large that the distance from one village to another averages four *li*, little more than a mile and a half. In the part occupied by the Communists, the boys worked out such a system of surveillance that in practice it was impossible to go from one place to another without being seen. If a suspicious character appeared, the group of boys in the neighbourhood immediately went into action and surrounded him. They began a cross-examination at once, searching and confusing,

each one having a question to ask. If the accosted person had a clear conscience and remained calm, he was accompanied to the village and handed over to the authorities. If, on the other hand, he had anything he wished to conceal or, which was worse, dared to abuse or beat the boys, they sent up shouts of 'Traitor! Spy! Help!' These were heard by other groups and repeated while one boy ran to the village to ask for the assistance of the *Min Ping*. As if by magic, the whole countryside from one village to another rang with these cries, and the unfortunate man was destined sooner or later to be caught in the net. Very many spies in Japanese pay at the beginning of the Communist occupation were captured in this way.

What inspired the boys with so much enthusiasm for acting as an unconscious but ardent advance guard of Communism was the knowledge that they were safe. When they found themselves in any difficulty, everyone, especially the *Min Ping*, was obliged to go to their help.

As I have said, at the beginning, or in places recently occupied, there were not the disgusting and terrible scenes that occurred in areas that had been in Communist hands for some time. The boys limited their activities to handing over to the authorities any obviously suspicious character. All this was an experiment that led to further developments. As the occupied territory grew in size, so the boys' education was broadened. They were made to understand that they represented an important element in society.

'Indeed,' they were told, 'you can do this work very well, probably better than older people with their slow brains and stiff muscles. You therefore have the right to be respected. Do you not reason, do you not think, do you not work like everyone else?'

The lesson was limited to this fundamental thought, which was repeated again and again with practical examples. The boys understood as much as their limited intelligences allowed, but they realized very clearly that there was a difference between the language used by the new schoolmaster and that used by their parents and the older people. They suspected, they apprehended vaguely—the older ones more distinctly—that they were admired and that society, or at least the village, needed them. And so Communism, with patience and perseverance, instructed these boys in how to be rude to anyone who reproved them, even to their fathers and mothers. The scenes that occurred between families and even inside families were very numerous and increased steadily. But whether he liked it or not, the boy had to

submit to his parents' authority. The Communists watched and waited for better things; in the meantime they were content with the educational victory they had won.

When the regime was completely established in the villages with its various associations of peasants, merchants, women, *Min Ping*, etc., the Communists began their real work—‘the transformation of society.’ People’s Courts were instituted, the activities of the People’s Commissars were laid down, a purge of ‘the ungrateful and unreliable’ was carried out, and a watch established on everyone and everything. The people were free to make accusations—in fact, were often compelled to—and to judge the accused. A wave of blood and terror ensured and passed over the country with devastating force. It was a terrible period, and the boys’ organization finally took shape. ‘You have always been examples in the way in which you have carried out your duties. Remember, however, that the most dangerous enemies still exist.’ And the Communists explained who these enemies were: parents who ill-treated their children; the older people who despised children; all those who prevented the natural development of children. This list is very important. Communism wished to deprive the parents of any part in their children’s moral education, which was to be entirely in the hands of the State.

Naturally the Communists did not say immediately, ‘Kill your parents, the old people, all those who curse and ill-treat you.’ That would follow when the boys had become accustomed to a life of crime and considered their parents to be hateful brakes on their conduct. To achieve their aim, the Communists offered the boys complete power. ‘The most dangerous enemies’ not having been eliminated, the guarding of the roads and villages became still more rigorous, and the *Erh T’ung Chün* took a more direct part in the maintenance of public order and the social renaissance.

The criminal desire of the Communists to spread ruin and disaster induced them to place two new terrible weapons into the boys’ hands. Let us see what happened. The people did not know who these ‘dangerous enemies’ were. In order to impress them, the Communists organized special meetings at which they explained that everyone leaving the village—man or woman, old or young—must be issued on each occasion by the authorities with a special permit, which had to show the surname, Christian name, place of departure, place of destination, the reason for the journey, and even the length of absence. They were to be given only by higher authorities such as

the mandarin, the chief of police, or the judge. Each permit had a large red stamp, and it should be added that the words 'Communism' or 'Communist' never appeared, but 'Mandarin for resistance against the Japanese' or the name of the place or the authority issuing the permit.

At a special session all this was explained to the boys, with every detail—the shape, the meaning, the number of red letters on the stamp. Their opinion was asked about the action that had been taken and their suggestions for any future alterations. Their opinion was always preferred to that of the adults, even if it were likely to lead to crimes committed from arrogance or carelessness. It was the first privilege, the first weapon, and those who used it with audacity were pointed out as models to the other boys.

The terrible consequences were seen in the families—insubordination, quarrels with parents, grumbling, rudeness; and when the boys were summoned to do their duty in watching the roads, they went to their posts as soon as the order came, regardless of home ties or domestic responsibilities.

All the roads, cross-roads and paths were under their control. A poor old man sets out; he does not understand anything about all the Communist regulations, except that the traffic controllers are a dangerous set whom he has never seen, and, not being able to grasp all the subtle moves in the Communist game, he has relapsed into the traditional frame of mind. 'I'm old, I'm useless. What can they do to me?' So, not giving a thought to the permit with the red stamp, he leaves the village. The boys stop him.

'Who are you? Where are you going?'

The old man, resenting this rudeness, replies: 'You little scoundrels, have you never been taught to behave?'

'There!'

A blow makes him stagger.

'Who are you? Where are you going? Have you a permit?'

'What permit?'

The boys crowd together and discuss the matter among themselves. 'Perhaps he's a spy.' A subtle and malicious series of questions confuse and terrify the old man. After interrogation comes the search; they strip him and go through his clothes with a thoroughness worthy of the police. Then he is taken to the village and handed over to the authorities. It is as well for him that age and humility have deprived him of all desire to resist. But being handed over to the authorities is

not the end of his troubles; there is the People's Court, a confession, perhaps torture, perhaps a fine.

Such cases occurred more or less frequently. At the beginning of this infamous Communist revolution, those less prudent than the rest thought of a China liberated by the old method of the *ch'a-pu-to* (little by little), and were misled by the moderation of the new order. They would leave the district without a permit and be seized by the *Erh T'ung Chün*. What happened is easier to imagine than describe—especially if the victim was a woman.

This disgusting depravity aroused a furious reaction among the people. The boys' families were insulted. To defend themselves and to wipe out what they regarded as a humiliating disgrace, they did not hesitate sometimes to bury their children alive, hurling the most bitter curses against Communism, which 'has stolen and ruined our children.' In some villages the people rose and lynched the commissars. The stories told of parents who, not able to bear the outrages and loss of 'face,' killed their own children, filled one with horror.

'If I must stain myself with blood,' said a father as he buried his son, 'I prefer that it should be my own blood. He who survives me will revenge me!'

This popular fury was a shadow that disturbed the Communists, and therefore it had to disappear. Courts, punishments, seizure of property, all on an unheard of scale, swept away in blood any further attempt at protests.

To put an end to any lingering opposition, the Communists placed a second weapon in the boys' hands. Anyone found without a permit, or who failed to show respect for the boys, or who showed annoyance, or did not answer their questions properly, or tried to frighten them, was to be tried by a special court composed of the boys themselves. Think what might happen to a man who was the plaything of such judges—judges who were, at the same time, executioners. It was horrible.

When an order for strict vigilance was issued (luckily it did not happen every day) nobody left his village, and the countryside was empty and silent.

'The fear caused by wolves when they come down from the mountains and invade the villages, or the terror caused by the bandits, is ten thousand times more preferable,' said the villagers, sad, distrustful and tired. 'Fan la t'ien ti la.' ('Heaven and earth are turned upside down.')

Every time I was able to go to the threshing-floor at the edge of the village with some old men during the days of rigorous vigilance, and saw some traveller go along the path carved in the dark green of the fields, I said to myself, 'He is mad.' My mind would wander away from the scene in front of me and I would think of myself on board a ship, watching a small boat in the middle of the sea, and when the guard appeared with sticks and lances in their hands to stop him, I would turn away, thinking of that tiny boat overwhelmed by the waves.

On such an occasion one of the old men said, his face full of hate: 'If only that man were a Political Commissar.'

This was an allusion to a recent happening in the Communist zone. One of these Political Commissars, returning from one of his usual dubious missions, was going towards Hochien. Belonging to the privileged class he had no permit. Having covered about twenty *li*, he fell in with a party of watchers, who did not know him and stopped him.

'I am a Political Commissar.'

'Show your permit,' said the boys.

He brought out papers proving his identity.

'We do not understand them,' they told him. 'We want the permit with the red stamp.'

He became annoyed and threatened them with punishment if they did not let him pass.

'Traitor! Enemy! Spy!'

The shouts echoed across the fields and parties from other roads arrived. Two or three boys clung to his legs, some to his arms, while others, shouting all the time, ran across the fields looking for the *Min Ping*. Ten minutes later the Commissar was bound and taken to the village. A Court was formed, questions and insults descending like a shower of stones, the prisoner swearing, cursing and threatening the boys. They laughed and, as a final humiliation, made this pillar of Communist propaganda kneel down, tied a chamber-pot to his neck and then made him parade round the village.

The heads of the village, seeing the man display such unusual anger, began to suspect the truth and asked to see his papers. Having discovered that he was the Commissar he claimed to be, they hastily endeavoured to put things right. They did their best to make the boys release him, but they refused, and in the end it was necessary to call the Commissar Instructor of the boys to deal with the situation.

'Old Master,'<sup>1</sup> continued the elderly man as if still thinking of this episode, 'you are a foreigner. You cannot imagine how much "face" that Commissar lost. Such things ought to happen every day. They would open the eyes of the Communists.'

As everyone knew this story, we expected the judge to mention it, and we therefore awaited his visit with amusement and curiosity, to see what he would say. As a matter of fact, he disappointed and surprised us, his only comment being:

'Even I get into trouble if I go without my permit.'

He then enlarged on the fine and meritorious work that was being done by the boys, what a sense of duty inspired them and on the peace that reigned in the regions where the *Erh T'ung Chün* was at work. As usual, we listened to him with disgust and it was very difficult to conceal our disapproval. The expressions on our faces cannot have been very different from his own, for he seemed less worried about the beatings than about the effort to make his smile appear less insincere.

The Communist chiefs, when they leave their lairs, never travel alone.

'Old Master,' said my elderly friend, 'when the queen bee leaves the hive she is followed by a swarm; when the mother scorpion goes out with her young on her tail, she is always followed by father scorpion. The boys do their duty; they would hold up the devil himself. And when the Communist chiefs travel, their followers should show the permit. Instead, there are kicks and beatings.'

In the end the boy wearis of being allowed to tyrannize over people. He gets tired of being able to do exactly as he likes; he longs for a happier and more natural life. The Communists, by their kicks and beatings, are really doing him a kindness, though they do not know it. After an interlude, which is so lacking in human affection and which outrages his natural instincts, a boy begins to feel distrust and fear. He does not reason, but is influenced by what he sees and feels at the moment.

'They say we are in control. Why do not the chiefs show us their permits? Why do they punish us instead? Why punish other people and not their own followers?'

The parents took advantage of this crisis and, urged on by a passion of hope, tried to reclaim their children while there was still time. The Communists, with promises and honeyed words, endeavoured to

<sup>1</sup> A term of the greatest respect in China.

induce the boys to go on with their work. In this desperate struggle between the voice of nature and the pressure to continue a life of crime, the Communists appeared to be losing. Their words were not sufficient to make the boys forget the kicks and the punishments. The situation was serious, the *Erh T'ung Chün* threatened to collapse—and desperate needs demand desperate remedies. The organization was put under an expert Political Commissar, compulsory turns of duty were established, and punishments were laid down for those who shirked. The rigorous vigilance was not to be general, the Commissar deciding which villages were to carry it out, and those in which it would not be enforced. Within an area of ten *li*, for example, it was to be in action in only one village, thereby making it easier to deceive the people and smell out the hidden enemy.

This new regulation aroused the boys' suspicion. The frenzied enthusiasm with which they had rushed to carry out the orders of their chiefs changed to a sullen resentment against any regulation or command, and this in its turn served to arouse a stupid and dangerous anger. The boys would be watching a road. When a man came along, they would stop him, ask for his permit, take it from him and then order him to go on. The poor man suddenly saw himself imprisoned on a desert island without any hope of escape; the loss of that piece of paper would perhaps cost him his life.

To overcome the obstinacy of the boys, the Commissars adopted a very simple remedy. In the *Erh T'ung Chün* there were a few boys who, from interested motives or from fear, or perhaps because they were completely corrupted, remained faithful to the chiefs. They became spies and informers.

After two or three punishments, the other boys became terrified and lifeless automatons. For them, too, the Communist reign of terror had begun. Poor little things, what pity I felt for them! Sometimes I saw them playing with such enthusiasm and gaiety that they might have just escaped from a convict prison; at other times they gathered on the threshing-floor and with miserable faces whispered to each other under their breath. They went off to their duties with hanging heads and in silence, but shortly afterwards they were shouting for help. Swayed alternately by love and anger, equally ready to cry and to laugh, they spent their lives passing from one emotion to another, without any moral training, waiting for a gloomy and tragic to-morrow.



Towards evening, we asked the old gentleman who had been to see us on the 1st August, the cause of all the comings and goings in the courtyard. He told us, as a secret, that, as far as he knew, there was nothing to fear. It was only some Communist troops passing through.

*5th August*

Early in the morning our people arrived from Suiyeh with everything necessary for the celebration of Mass. To see those faces warmed my heart and recalled many happy and sad memories. What a fatal day the 29th June had been!

The schoolmaster—a recent convert, but loving the Church so much—was among those who arrived. The poor fellow had got very, very thin and showed signs of having suffered a great deal. As soon as he saw us he began to cry, which is very infectious. I greeted them all and then went outside in order not to show my own weakness.

They said that the day after we were carried off, everyone at the Mission wept; even the pagans were indignant. At about six o'clock, the secretary to the Communist General Pei drove all the Christians out of the Mission and then left himself. But he came back at dusk and attacked the schoolmaster violently, demanding European arms. The master declared that the Fathers were not bandits and never had had any arms. Accompanied by him and two Christians, the secretary went into the house, took what he fancied and went away swearing. He returned early next morning, threatened, swore and again searched for arms.

Meanwhile a party of Christians collected some things that had been left in the church; even succeeding in carrying off the harmonium. About noon, the people were ordered to kill all the personnel and to destroy the Mission.

'The European devils who were here were all traitors. Now they are dead, and all their work must disappear with them.'

The work was to have begun the next day. After dinner, however, the news spread that the Japanese were advancing with guns and armoured cars towards Suiyeh. The stream of Communists marching to Changte was attacked and decimated. They retired towards the mountains, destroying and massacring as they went. When the Japanese reoccupied the city, the remaining Christians were frightened, but stood firm in their faith. They knew of our flight and expressed different opinions on the subject. It was said that we had been buried alive.

After hearing this and other news, we read the letters from our brethren. I did not know if I at least was worthy of the kind things they said about us.

The greatest joy was that to-morrow we could celebrate Mass. We were all very happy and, in a moment of affection, the schoolmaster gave us some advice. He said that we should not show anger when we talked to each other or to other people, that we should not be discouraged, and above all, that we should not try to escape. Poor man, how much he had suffered for the God who, since his baptism, seemed to have sent him nothing but pain. I felt great affection for him and was humiliated because I could not help him. There were many other fearful souls among the other recent converts.

Towards evening the judge came with his secretary. They appeared cheerful and talked readily to the schoolmaster. They seemed to realize that he was a remarkable man and, under a veneer of politeness, insisted on hearing his news.

When night fell and darkness covered everything, we gathered in the room, the intimacy making us all the more affectionate. I thought of the holy nights of the first Christians in the catacombs; they must have been like this. And perhaps for us, too, the day of martyrdom was not far distant. 'Our greatest fear,' I wrote, 'is that we shall not be found worthy. O God, how inscrutable are Thy ways!'

#### *6th August. The Feast of the Transfiguration*

The night passed calmly if sleeplessly; nothing disturbed us and our souls were at peace. It was the Feast of the Transfiguration. 'It is good for us to be here.' Yes, even if the walls were those of a prison. Who knew if we should see the eternal light that shone on Mount Tabor? The joy of waiting to make the supreme sacrifice! We began to be free in Christ while waiting for the criminal, whoever he might be, who would make us free of the perfect liberty of Christ. We wanted to have heaped upon us all the insults and the sins of the world, so that we might forgive them. How true it is that God never troubles the souls of His faithful people except to prepare them for an even sweeter and more comforting peace.

The few Christians present made their confessions with the most lively faith. Our feelings were in tune with theirs. It is charity that unites, that teaches humility and that exalts the humble.

It was still early when the divine sacrifice began; the Christians, with quiet voices, were saying their prayers. What difference was there

between us and the first Christians in the catacombs? Would our faith and our charity equal those of the first martyrs? We distributed the bread. More than one of the Christians was crying. I should have liked to embrace and kiss each one of them. Oh, how apposite was that kiss before the Communion in the liturgy of the Mass! Never in my life had I understood its divine and profound meaning as at that moment. Nobody can understand it who has not felt it.

The Mass was finished and the storm (I cannot find a better word) of divine tenderness had melted into an indescribable peace and a smile that shone on the faces of all. Who knew if the Saviour did not want us to keep that spirit to the end?

In the evening the judge came with his secretary and suddenly started to question the schoolmaster.

'You say you are from Anyen, but I have seen you before. I remember your face.'

The schoolmaster tried to skate round the subject, but finally confessed that he came from Linhsien. The secretary, usually so timid, instantly became viperish. He wanted to know—to clear things up.

The schoolmaster was alarmed.

'This is no place for me,' he said when the judge had left.

It was decided that he and the other Christians should leave on the morrow, which was contrary to what we had said to the two visitors. They represented a danger and it was better to avoid another meeting. Poor schoolmaster! After supper, he repeated his former advice with an earnestness and a kindness that were really touching.

## CHAPTER

# 5

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*8th August 1945*

O NCE again we were alone. The Christians had left, our thoughts following them anxiously. At ten o'clock in the morning, the judge and his secretary came again and wanted to speak to the schoolmaster.

'He left before dawn,' we said.

A contraction of the judge's lips showed his disapproval, but he cunningly and quickly recovered himself. It was the first snub he had had from us and he was evidently annoyed. We, too, were upset, but things were better as they were.

We apologized, saying, 'His presence was necessary at Suiyeh. The school and all our possessions are there, as well as the Christians—and the Japanese, who are always so kind to us.'

He was very worried about all this. We implied:

'You brought us here. You robbed us of everything. You have destroyed our Mission.'

At last he went away.

If we had known what their plans for us were, it would have been easier to decide on our line of conduct, but we were always in a state of uncertainty, which was a great strain on the nerves. They had seized us because we were priests and because they did not know what our relations were with the enemy. The first offence was quite obvious, but they must be still mystified about the second. Investigations, if they made any, would not do us any harm. It was a question of time. Given the opportunity, no doubt they would find us guilty. But the sentence? It was better not to think about that, although my meditations led to but one conclusion: the worst that could happen to me was to die.

With this picture before me, three men came in. I did not think that I had ever seen them. Nobody knew what they wanted. Perhaps

news of the schoolmaster? I was seized by a horrible suspicion: had we sent him to his death? Had they captured him? I went into the house with them. They sat down.

With an evil smile one of them asked me in Italian:

'Are you Carlo Suigo?'

'Yes,' I replied.

'Good. I am very pleased to meet you and to know that you are a doctor. You will help us, won't you? You see, we have no doctor here.'

I understood what game they were playing, and I interrupted him.

'But I am not a doctor and never have been a doctor.'

He smiled and handed me a piece of paper, saying:

'Perhaps this diploma is not yours, but refers to some other Suigo?'

This devil was certain of his facts.

'Yes, it is mine, but it is not a doctor's diploma, but a nurse's.'

'Oh, among us a foreign nurse is worth all our doctors, even those with a university degree.'

'It is very kind of you to say that, but in Europe the students take this diploma not because they want to be nurses, but because they want to be able to look after their own health.'

He was very surprised.

'I am sorry,' I added, rising to my feet, 'but the help for which you ask me is not feasible.'

They did not say anything more to me, but my fate was decided. They exchanged some words among themselves, got up, and went away.

The curtain had risen and the comedy was in full swing. Among the booty seized at the Mission was that blessed diploma. Any effort to deal with the new situation would be useless. To refuse would be fatal; to say that the Bishop would not allow the use of medicines would be simply ridiculous. I decided to go to the judge and tell him that I would not act as a doctor.

The judge was away.

A very gloomy night. The heat seemed to stimulate all the insects that kept me company. After midnight I got up and went into the courtyard, but my exhaustion and the pain in my leg drove me back to the battlefield of the bugs, fleas and mosquitoes. Even the mice did not seem afraid of us.

The fears of the night were increased in the morning by the attitude of the judge. To our protests that we were not doctors and that the Bishop would not allow us to act as such, he replied:

'It is very easy to ask your Bishop's permission. We will send someone to Tienchiaching.' He turned to me. 'It is not a question of your acting as a doctor, but you must come to the hospital we intend to put up here, and give us a little help. We have very few medicines here and nobody knows anything about them.'

Father Perottini insisted that we could not act as doctors. Seeing that things were beginning to go very badly, I interrupted:

'Give me time to think. I will give you an answer to-morrow or the next day.'

To my great surprise, these words had the effect of a flash of lightning on a dark night. The judge's expression changed, and he smiled kindly as he said:

'That's right, that's right. Think carefully, for this is a serious question.'

Then he went on talking about the hospital to be built for the benefit of the people—to cure their diseases. What mockery to talk of pity for the people who, under Communism, are neither more nor less than beasts of burden, to be used by the Communists as long as they are useful and to be thrown away if they become a nuisance.

'And you,' he went on, respectfully but awkwardly, for he was always awkward, 'who have come to China to help the Chinese people, I cannot believe that you will refuse your help in this work of charity.'

This was an example of their diabolical system—to encircle the innocent, to force them to collaborate in such a way that, without realizing it, their characters are undermined; they lose their freedom of action, and behave as if hypnotized. The Communists say: 'You must die,' and the poor wretches accept their fate as if it was a necessary thing. This is the liberty preached by these disciples of the new creed.

When the judge left, we discussed the question. Father Perottini and Father Monti felt that I ought not to have promised anything. I explained my attitude: the Communists wanted a hospital, but a hospital could not exist without medicines. When they asked us for them, we could confuse the whole affair and gain time. On the other hand, their minds were made up and they could force us to comply.

with their demands. I thought it better to promise and not to offend them too much, but Father Perottini said that if I promised medicines, sooner or later I should have to supply them. I had thought of this. The road to Changte was long and the person sent to get the medicines would be one of our people. We could say to him: 'Go to the town, tell them our news, and come back with empty hands.' Such an excuse would avoid two evils, and would it not enable us to get into touch more easily with the Christians and do some good?

My reasoning prevailed and the sky became clear again.

*10th August*

To-day the judge made us feel dizzy.

'You have a hospital at Changte with wards and nurses. Let us write to the director and ask him to send us four or five nurses. What do you think?'

The suggestion was most surprising.

'The nurses are nuns and they are not allowed to travel.'

'If, instead of four or five, we asked for about ten? Then it would not be necessary for all of you to go to the hospital. We only want Father Suigo for a few months. When we have occupied other important places, you can be set free. What do you think? Again, your hospital at Changte must be very badly treated, as it is in the Japanese zone. Would it not be better to transport it here? And to bring the priests as well?'

I felt that I had to speak plainly.

'Impossible.'

The word was like a bucket of cold water on a fire threatening to blaze up. The scoundrel realized he had gone too far, and hastily retreated.

'No, no, we are not insisting on that. We only meant if it were possible—if you wanted it.'

He had made his purpose perfectly clear; it only remained to see what means he would use to gain his ends. He would certainly do something—perhaps torture us. We were in his power. What could we have done? Nothing. We were prisoners. That was our misfortune.

We went to bed, but none of us was able to sleep. The heat was suffocating, and the vermin were determined to have the last drop of our blood. Would they had been our only troubles!

*11th August*

That morning a soldier came to tell us that the Japanese had laid down their arms. We thought it was probably true; with the atomic bomb, the Americans could force any nation to surrender.

The judge asked us to send the servant to Changte to get medicines and to ask the Bishop to allow the nurses to come here. We could not refuse. I wrote to Father Pessina, requesting him to send the bottles half empty and very few of them. As for the permission, I mentioned it, but knew what the reply would be, so everything was settled. The servant was to leave the next day. The judge went back to his office to write the permit. Some Christians had been present and they suggested that we should ask for permission to go to Tienchiaching for the Feast of the Assumption. It was a good idea—enabling us to discover how real our liberty was. The judge came back with the permit and we told him what we wanted to do.

‘Very well,’ he said, ‘I have nothing against it and I will speak to the mandarin.’

He left us with a smile. The Christians were beside themselves with joy. Two of them immediately spread the news through the village, while the others waited for the mandarin’s reply.

*12th August*

Father Perottoni and Father Monti went to see the judge, to enquire if permission had been given.

‘The mandarin was not at home,’ he answered. ‘You must be patient.’

The two priests came back rather annoyed. The judge was an important official and if he wished to do so he could give us the permit without referring to the mandarin. One of the Christians thought it would be better to go straight to the mandarin, but that was not possible for us.

In the evening I went out leaning on my stick and met the judge’s secretary. I asked him why we were not allowed to go to Tienchiaching. He answered, as usual, that he really knew nothing and, as a matter of fact, the judge had not refused permission. I asked if the mandarin was at home and he said he was.

‘He has not been away these last days?’

‘No.’

The position was quite clear; the mandarin was at home, and the judge was doing exactly what he liked.

After supper the Christians told us endless stories of the acts of injustice, of the disgusting behaviour and of the atrocities committed by the Communists.

'Our children do not belong to us any more. The People's Commissar teaches them to disobey us, saying that there is no difference between children and adults. Many families are forced to allow their children to be educated in vice and crime. People no longer have any right to anything—not even to their wives. You see that men's prison there? Inside are some men who have been imprisoned because they refused to give up their wives. Others were tortured and killed as if they had been rebels against the law.'

They told us, too, what they had suffered for their religion. Two years ago a party of women tried to go to Weihui for Easter. They were discovered, ill-treated, and now their lives were a nightmare.

This was the religious freedom of which the Communists boast so loudly. They knew that if we were allowed to go to Tienchiaching, we should see and hear things that they were determined to conceal because they were so disgraceful. I believed that was the only reason why they would not let us go there.

*13th August*

During Mass, a Communist came in and, seeing the gathering, asked what we were doing. The servant explained, but the man did not believe him and stayed out of curiosity. Nobody went near him and, understanding nothing about the service, he went away cursing. The judge came again, his answer the same as on the day before.

'The mandarin is not at home.'

I wanted to tell him what I thought, but decided it was better to hold my tongue. We were in China where to prove to a man that he is playing a double game is to make him 'lose face,' all the more so if he is someone in authority, and more especially still if he is a Communist.

The Christians suggested that other steps should be taken—that they should go home and invite the authorities of the district and a committee representing the people to go to the judge.

'They are always saying that the people govern, that the people are above the law. Now we shall see what happens.'

And they went off.

The position was becoming clearer. The kindness of the judge was

nothing but a sham. We were prisoners who must obey and ask for nothing.

*14th August*

The judge arrived with a gloomy face, very sad because he could not please us. He had such command of his expression that he looked as if he might burst into tears at any moment. He did not suspect, poor fellow, that that very day he would have to obey the people's will!

But his unconvincing benevolence was mixed up with an important affair—the hospital. He discussed it again—the doctors, the medicines, the building, the personnel, etc.

'Naturally,' he assured me, 'the hospital will be yours, all yours. It will even be called by your name!'

What generosity! He reached the climax when he added with complete self-possession:

'As for the money, I know that it will cost you a good deal.'

At midday the Christians from Tienchiaching arrived with the district authorities and the representatives of the people. They were received by the judge with surprise and suspicion. The head of the district spoke, explaining why they had come and asking for the permit.

The judge replied: 'Whether these Europeans go or not is nothing to do with me or with you. I am angry at your behaviour. Remember your relations with these traitors are watched, so mind your own business.'

Those faithful Christians, as firm in their faith as the rocks of their own mountains, refused to be silenced. They argued, pleaded, insisted.

The judge dropped his mask.

'Stinking slaves!'

And he drove them out. They went away crestfallen, furious with the scoundrel.

It is easy to imagine the impression this made on us, but we accepted with resignation even this blow in the face. The Christians did not wish to leave us and almost all stayed to spend the Feast with us. A few went home very reluctantly, to tell the bad news. At last the day came to an end. Nobody knew what would happen next day during Mass. 'The people's will is law!'

*15th August. The Feast of the Assumption*

What a comfort it is, at difficult moments in life, to think of one's mother! Who could be more unhappy than we were? Who could be more in need of help?

An earthly mother trembles for her son. The Mother of Heaven sees, comforts, gives us courage. Gloomy thoughts pass, just as this life will pass. Even the stories the Christians told were seen in another light, the light of pity. Even in China, the ancient faith did not lack moral warnings. The most horrible was an ex-seminarist who had received much help from us at Suiyeh. God had struck him at the beginning of his backsliding. He and his wife were covered with repulsive sores.

'How many families weep for such a misfortune?' said the Christians.

And nobody dared to touch him because he was a pet of the Communist chiefs, who declared that he was an exemplary citizen.

'Father, he has been declared "a holy Communist,"' remarked a sharp boy of fifteen, and everyone laughed.

'Ah well,' said an old man, who remembered the story of the martyr Perboyre.<sup>1</sup> 'If the Church found its Saints among such people, in three days all China would declare itself Christian!'

We heard again the story of the bell of the Shrine of the Madonna at Tienchiaching, which still defied all the efforts of the Communists to take it down; the destruction of the statue of the Madonna; the cruelty to the poor Christian, Sin P'i, who had been the doorkeeper at the Mission of Hsiaochuang and had been in prison for two years. The Communists wanted the documents, the wireless and 'the valuable possessions of the European dogs.' They told us of the violation of the tomb of Monsignor Scarella, of the useless attempt to throw down the statue of Christ above the mausoleum—a failure, for the statue was still there, standing in triumph above the ruins of the Mission, destroyed by the hatred of the Communists. They told us of the trouble that they had to hide the few pennies they earned by selling firewood. A Christian showed me his clothes.

'Look, Father, I have to wear them inside out so that they may look as ragged as other people's clothes.'

'Be careful what you say,' remarked somebody, 'in case anyone is listening outside.'

<sup>1</sup> A French missionary who had spent part of his life in that neighbourhood and had been martyred by the Chinese in 1840.

A boy said proudly, 'They can do what they like, but we shall never believe what they say.'

Dear Christians, their fathers' faith lived in them. All had suffered terribly, but they made a joke of their miseries. How clearly one saw the result of a faith not that of the Communists.

*16th August*

The paper had large headlines announcing the surrender of the Japanese. The Communists were mad with joy.

'Our only and our greatest enemy has disappeared.'

It was perfectly true; the evil spirit that possessed these devils in human shape found in the Japanese, at one and the same time, a help to their expansion and a mortal foe.

At ten o'clock three men who wished to chatter came in. I had not seen these boring protagonists for some days. Now that the question of the hospital seemed to be going well, they began their work again. It is not easy to recognize as earnest idealists these people utterly sunk in materialism.

'I know about your religion,' one of them said to me—and truthfully. 'I admire your philosophy. It has known how to create a system very well suited to solving many moral problems. The creation of a God is wonderful.'

'No,' I replied, 'our philosophy does not create a God. God is not the product of our imagination. If God did not exist, if He were the outcome of our brains, I should be the stupidest of men.'

They looked at me as if they wanted to say, 'Old stuff.'

'We admire you for your intelligence,' one said aloud, 'but at the same time we pity you, for your philosophy prevents you from knowing the whole truth.'

'No, there is no danger that I shall ever become a Communist. I should like to ask your companions why they believe in the ideas of Marx and Stalin.'

At these words, one of them sprang to his feet.

'You are too accustomed to imposing your ideas on other people. Know that those times are finished. Now you must listen and accept what we accept.'

'If you could convince me, perhaps . . .'

'We shall know how to convince you.'

He made a sign to the others and they all left.

I wondered what means they would use—the usual cruel ones, I

supposed. They would have used them already had it not been for the medicines and the hospital.

During the afternoon, they brought us papers and special numbers. One attracted our attention. Its contents were entirely devoted to abuse and denunciation of the governor of the province of Shansi, General Yen Hsi-shan. Our hopes rose. Now that the Japanese had disappeared from the scene, to destroy this discontented rabble would not take the Nationalist army a month. But a terrible suspicion quenched our hopes. When they found themselves in difficulties, would the Communists leave us untouched? Would they not play some cruel joke on us?

17th August

They sent for me to visit a sick baby. I consented to go only in answer to the prayers of the poor father, the head of the district. The baby was suffering from elephantiasis and nothing could be done. The family was a little vexed, which pleased me because they would spread the idea that I was no good as a doctor.

On my way back, a boy of about eight popped up in front of me, brandishing a lance at least four times as long as himself.

'Who are you?' he demanded. 'What are you doing? Where are you going?'

I looked at him and began to laugh, which I should not have done. He opened his mouth and began to shout:

'European dog! Traitor! Help!'

Other dirty, naked little creatures rushed up and I was suddenly surrounded by a hedge of tyrants—the *Erh T'ung Chün* in action. Fortunately the head of the district was with me, and he, by a mixture of kindness and authority, succeeded in calming them and sending this pack of little mastiffs back to their posts. The episode made a great impression on me, and I thought what a disaster it would be for the world if Communism were to triumph.

In the house I found some newspapers, which I looked at one by one, thinking how strange it was that, when the Communists gave military news, they were absolutely truthful. When they said they had taken such and such a place, they really had taken it; when they said they had lost such and such a place, they really had lost it. But in the middle one met the lie that was fed to the people. 'Now almost the whole of China is in our hands. The head of the Republic has fled and this is the moment to drive out the Americans.'

From the news in the paper, I gathered that the Communists were about twenty-five *li* from Peking and had taken several important places in Manchuria and in Shantung. It was very mysterious. What were the Nationalist troops and the Americans doing? From time to time, aeroplanes flew over; they were not Chinese.

18th August

I was able to move about a little with the help of my stick, which I had not dared to give up altogether. I felt that I had escaped from a certain danger.

The three Communists came again that morning. They enquired about everything and asked innumerable stupid questions. They also discussed religion. Their arguments were ridiculous, and when I answered them, they made indecent jokes. They wanted to know what we thought about women and how we behaved to them. The one with the small dirty face, so like the words he uttered, asked:

'What do you say to women when they come to speak to you in the cupboard?<sup>1</sup> And what do they say to you? And what do you teach in the girls' school?'

He was playing with a big revolver, as so many of them did, and seemed to be enjoying himself.

I started to go into the courtyard, but they stopped me. I showed my disgust at their conduct, which made them behave worse than ever. There was no escape and I had to submit, though it was almost unbearable. The greater the repugnance I felt to answering their questions, the more determined they were to force me to speak—and woe betide me if I did not! Finally they left. I went into the courtyard, feeling I must have a little fresh air and daylight after this interview.

After dinner there was a special meeting for the boys, addressed by a People's Commissar, who spoke with such false geniality that he gave the impression that he was making fun of his listeners. He realized our presence and suddenly put an end to his discourse, ordering the boys to disperse 'because those European devils must not know what we are doing.'

We had the usual bad night, among a crowd of the *Min Ping*. Some slept, the others smoked and chattered, but always with their eyes on us.

<sup>1</sup> The confessional.

*19th August*

As was customary, the judge came to see us. He began again on his favourite topic—the hospital, medicines, the permission of the Bishop, etc. He said that he had several sick people for me to visit. I pointed out my incompetence, but it was useless to argue and I had to make a virtue of necessity. Yes, I would work as a doctor, but I would limit myself to not killing anybody. Whatever I did would be purely for the sake of the poor people whom he and his kind oppressed so ruthlessly.

He again suggested that I should ask for payment from people who wanted medicine, or when I went to see them. The hint was too wicked and dishonourable, and I had no intention of doing anything of the kind.

At four o'clock in the afternoon, the servant arrived from Changte with letters and medicines. We devoured our letters. Poor brethren, what terrible days they were living through for fear that the town would fall into the hands of the Communists! We learned that Suiyeh had been evacuated by the Japanese and the Communists had returned 'with fire and sword.' A large part of the population had fled and the Communist terror had increased. Fortunately the Christians had not suffered. There were also three letters from Father Pessina to the Communist authorities, begging that I might be allowed to go to Changte for treatment for my leg.

I opened the parcel of medicines; they had sent what I asked for, and in addition two scalpels, a stethoscope and some tweezers. It was really too much. I sent for the judge, who, radiant with delight, regarded the parcel as the equivalent of half a chemist's shop. The servant who had been told what to say, reported that he had been in great danger when he left the town, and that the greater part of the instruments and medicine had been taken from him before he arrived in the Communist zone. Poor judge, he had to make a great effort to believe what the servant said. I tried to console him and promised to send the servant back. I praised the medicines to him, and ended by assuring him that, even if the supply was very small, it would be possible to do some good.

*20th August*

We found out that several Christians had come to see us, but had been brutally treated by the soldiers. We learned from a Christian

from Tienchiaching that another meeting had been held to discuss our fate. He said it ended with the shout:

‘These foreigners should be buried alive.’

The people behave like automatons under the omnipotent Communists. What they say is not the ‘will of the people,’ but of the chiefs.

This meeting might have meant one of two things—it was either intended to intimidate us, and therefore compel us to demand medicines (I thought this was the truth), or they were beginning to ring our death-knell. However, we were always on our guard. We had been prepared for some time and it was not the first demonstration against us.

The Christian gave us some other alarming news: the sick people were beginning to arrive. The first was a soldier attached to the judge. He had a swollen leg covered with syphilitic sores. I advised injections.

‘You must cure me with your medicines,’ he answered insolently.

I washed the sores and put on a mercury ointment.

‘You are deceiving me,’ he said. ‘It’s not certain that the medicine you are using will cure me.’

And he went away muttering something. A short time afterwards I heard him grumbling to his companions:

‘Take care never to trust your life to that foreign devil.’

One of the others remarked with a laugh:

‘Don’t you see the foreign devil was making a fool of you? He’s got good medicines, but they are not for you.’

The patient, whose vanity was wounded by the general hilarity, came back to me.

‘The medicine to cure my leg ought to burn, but I don’t feel anything. I know you have the right medicine. Why don’t you give it to me?’

When ignorance and insolence reach such a pitch, there is only one thing to be done. I took off the bandages, washed his sores for a second time.

‘Sit down,’ I said to him, ‘and I will give you the medicine you want.’

I opened a little packet of sulphate of magnesia, took a spoonful and spread it carefully on his sores. The effect was immediate. ‘That’s the medicine I want,’ said he through his clenched teeth, trembling with pain.

I could not help smiling with pity.

*21st August*

During the morning, one of the soldiers brought us some pairs of Chinese slippers. When we asked him where they had come from, he replied that two people he did not know had brought them. Thinking that they may have come to see us and had not been admitted, I limped out and found a frightened and trembling Christian leaning against the corner of the gate. He was as yellow as a lemon and some soldiers were insulting him. He and I exchanged a long glance, pregnant with meaning, then I looked at the ruffians and none of them dared to speak. The Christian said to me:

‘There is another of us outside.’

I took him by the arm and brought him in. We showed our mutual delight in the presence of the sentry, who stood with his mouth open, staring at this demonstration of affection. I invited the sentry to go away. He nodded and complied. There followed a torrent of questions and replies. Unfortunately we were obliged to put a stop to the conversation and send the Christian and his friend outside away; their arrival had been too dramatic. I told them how they ought to behave if they wanted to get in.

‘Don’t be afraid, Shenfu,’ they reassured me. ‘Now that we know the place, the devil himself won’t keep us out.’

They were two very devout Christians from Suiyeh and traded on the secret market. The following week they were to come again. Here was another way of communicating with the Christians and the missionaries at Changte. It was a great blessing.

When they had left, the ruffians came to stare. They gaped with half-open mouths, laughed and went away. One, however, let fall the words:

‘It’s no good. We must come back another time.’

Even such a little victory served as a stimulus for the struggles of the future.

*22nd August*

Some Christians came from Tienchiaching, but they were not allowed to see us because we were ‘foreign traitors.’ In the morning there was an incident similar to that of the day before. A Christian girl and her mother wanted to see us. The mother was allowed in, but the girl was stopped. But she was a schoolmistress from a nearby village and the type who could look after herself. She behaved as Chinese women do when they are in a rage, reducing the soldiers to

silence. I wanted to go out, but it seemed dangerous, and after a moment she came in with a scarlet face.

They told us more stories of diabolical behaviour.

'More than one family,' said the mother, 'has fallen, as we have, into disgrace with the Communists, and we live with a rope round our necks—all because of my daughter. . . . They haven't done anything to us yet, and they pretend to take no interest in us, but the day will come. . . . Oh God!'

She was crying, poor woman. Even the daughter was trembling, fearing for her virtue, which had been threatened many times by these satellites of Satan. We comforted her as best we could.

After they had left, the people were summoned to another Court, and all began to examine their consciences. No one knew if he was to play the part of the judge or the criminal.

The Court this morning was to hear the case of a prisoner who, a few days before, while he was carrying a sack of flour to the mandarin, had boxed the ears of a woman prisoner who was with him.

To touch a woman in China is an unjustifiable offence. Even in the most terrible quarrels between families, when men beat and kill each other, a woman can hit a man to her heart's content, but the man is most careful not to do anything to her. She can let flow a stream of hatred and abuse until she foams at the mouth, she can hit him over the head, but he dare not lift a hand.

The woman prisoner told her story to her companions in misfortune, who were furious. They determined to have a People's Court to punish the offender. He was condemned to walk round the village three times beating a drum and shouting: 'Come and see a man who has dared to strike a woman!' In addition, his prison sentence was increased by five years.

Given the many brutalities of Communists in everyday life, one thinks of prisons as horrible, terrifying places. But apparently that is a mistake. I am speaking of the prisons that came directly under the judge. When, during our first days in that place, I found out that the buildings near us were prisons, and that the voices I heard morning and evening chanting the praises of Mao Tse-tung were those of prisoners, I felt overwhelmed with sadness. I had heard of such terrible tortures and deeds of blood in the Communist prisons and had seen people bearing the marks of the tortures they had undergone. I was, therefore, very astonished when I saw the prisoners working in the fields, drawing water from a public well, taking the sheep and the

pigs to graze, attending the blindfold donkey that patiently turned the grinding-stone, carrying orders from one place to another—all without any warders. Not only that: among the prisoners was a young schoolmaster who left the prison every morning and went to teach in a nearby village. The first yard with an annexe which separated our dwelling from the street was fitted up as a hotel and run by a prisoner.

The first time I had an opportunity to speak to these unfortunate men had been a few days previously. The manager of the hotel was lamenting that the rats were eating the bread. To put an end to this, which might be dangerous both to himself and to the reputation of his hotel, he turned everything upside down and managed to dislodge a large rat, which, seeing itself cornered, jumped up and bit his hand. Its teeth were so strong that they went right through the palm. He came running to me and I did my best for him. When he had recovered from the shock, I asked him some questions.

'Thank goodness,' he said, 'the Communists put me in prison. If I had not been punished, my eyes would never have been opened. The Communists are more loving than a father. I can't praise Communism enough. If the sun rises every day, it is because they are here, if we live, it is because they give us life. The Communists are all good fellows.'

He shouted at us as if we were deaf, and gesticulated as if defending himself from an imaginary enemy. Poor wretch, he had taken us for Communist bosses. When he heard that we were priests of the Catholic Church and prisoners like himself, he opened his eyes and looked at us with terror. He did not believe us and, frightened of some unknown danger, bent his head, took his wounded hand in the other and went away saying: 'I don't know anything. I don't take any interest. . . .'

It was the first and last time we had anything to do with each other. He always ran away from us. Several times I tried to ask him how his hand was.

'It is cured,' he said, and disappeared.

I was never able to understand his curious conduct. The other prisoners would stop and talk to us in such loud voices that they seemed to be addressing someone a mile away, but this one avoided us. I was full of pity for him.

I noticed that none of the prisoners was able to follow the thread of a conversation. Some did not even seem to know what they were doing. Several times I saw one of them come into our courtyard with a worried look in his eyes.

'Have you seen the judge's hen?' was his question.

He would wander round the courtyard, pick up a bucket and run out, only to return again with empty hands. The owner of the house enquired:

'Where have you taken the bucket?'

'I don't know.'

'What do you want?'

'I don't know.'

'Have you found the hen?'

'I don't know.'

'You see, Shenfu,' said the old man, 'what they are reduced to.'

These and other disconnected remarks, mingled with sobs, excited my curiosity and I asked for an explanation.

'Since you have been here,' he answered, 'you have heard shouts and cries during the night. By day they have to "confess" in turn. If you stand near that wall you can hear the questions and answers. Formerly they shouted more and you could tell how long the "confession" lasted.'

'How long?'

'Sometimes a whole morning, or a day or several days. Gradually they become as stupid as the one who came a little while ago looking for the hen.'

Appearances are the first thing that must be saved. In this the Communists follow the Chinese tradition. The impression must be given that the prisoners are like all other free men. Everyone can visit the prisons and, by special permission, can see what the prisoners have to eat, their sleeping accommodation, what they do, how they are treated. Their relatives can come and talk to them for as long as they like. In some cases the prisoners are even allowed to go out. Things are arranged in such a way that nobody knows the real state of affairs, and they are forced to admire the wisdom and, I might almost say, the care taken by the Communists not to break the laws. In China no one in prison need worry about food, about clothes, about lodging. Under the Communists all these tiresome details cease to exist, and it is not necessary for the relatives to trouble about such things. If the Communist prisons really limited themselves to such an exhibition of kindness and pity, ninety-eight per cent of the population would become prisoners, if only to escape from the wickedness and the terrible injustices to which they have to submit every day, making life intolerable. The truth is very different. The previous day, a woman

bending under an immense bundle had presented herself at the gate of the prison and asked to see her son.

'He's not here,' they told her.

'But—'

'Go away and don't come here again.'

She begged, cried, implored them at least to tell her if they had killed him. The answer was a kick and an order to go away at once. Such scenes take place when a prisoner is transferred from the judge's to the mandarin's prison at Shanchuang. It is difficult for people to find out when this transfer takes place, and when a prisoner disappears they say, 'He has been buried alive.'

Those are the real convict jails, which no one must know about and even less, ask to visit. The unfortunate being who is taken there may be almost certain that he will never see the light again until the day he is tortured. The judge's is, therefore, only a transit prison, a happy place—notwithstanding the torturing. I asked for information about the mandarin's prison, but no one could give me any concrete facts. Perhaps we were destined to meet the same end as those unfortunate creatures who yesterday were happily tending the pigs and the sheep, singing while the donkey with the bandage over its eyes turned the grinding-stone. Such a thought frightened me. I would rather they hanged me. Up to that moment none of us had dared to envisage such a terrible future, but even if we never spoke about it, each perceived that our greatest preoccupation was that, and that alone!

We consoled ourselves by remembering that not all prisoners went to the mandarin's jails. 'Heaven send,' we prayed, 'that we are condemned to cultivate the land of the Santa Infanzia—the orphanage of the Holy Childhood—at Hsiaochuang.'

In spite of all my efforts, I could not find out what were the crimes for which a prisoner was sent to the mandarin's jails. It was a mystery closely connected with the secret activities of the Communist party, politics no doubt playing a large part.

Before a prisoner passes along this dark corridor of death, he has to undergo a minute examination of his whole life, a work most effectively carried out, as I have said, by means of the confession—*t'an-pai*<sup>1</sup> *t'an-pai*, as it is called. At the same time as the confession, there is a period of persuasion with interminable sermons and lectures to 'open the prisoner's mind'—that is to say, to make him understand the crime that must be expiated. The moral disintegration (it would be very

<sup>1</sup> *T'an-pai*, literally, 'open clean,' repeated for emphasis, as often in Chinese.

interesting to study the expressions used by the people to brand the infamy of the Communists) is facilitated by the use of torture, 'which makes the brain docile and opens it to the truth.'

To enquire if a person is guilty or not of the crime of which he is accused is beside the point. The fact that he has been put in prison proves that he is guilty. I have said that the Communists pay great attention to keeping up appearances, so there is a sham trial. Let us be quite clear: a Court of Justice, like all other Communist government departments, commands no respect.

Generally the best house has been sequestered 'for the people' and may be used as any kind of office. It must not be imagined that the judges are competent people. The most ignorant man, provided that he has a good opinion of himself, has a more biting eloquence than others, combined with a cunning acceptance of Communist principles, makes the best judge. There are no counsel for the defence; accused and prosecutor must speak for themselves. Usually the prisoner appears in court immediately after the so-called confession—that is, when he is reduced to such a state that he cannot reason about himself or the world at large. The people say that these ignorant judges, in order not to lose face before a man capable of defending himself, refuse to allow him to speak and, being very careful to protect themselves, have 'put earth in people's brains,' which, being interpreted, means the tortures they have undergone.

'None of our prisoners thinks of escaping.' Those words, which in the first days had made me despise the shameless arrogance of the Communists and feel a profound pity for innocent prisoners, now flashed upon me with their terrible meaning. Apart from the experiences of our abortive flight, none of us had understood the inwardness of that sentence of the judge's. It was as if he had said, 'None of my oxen runs away,' when they were chained up—and the chains were of iron. But I noticed something even more repulsive in the Communist dealings with prisoners, and the treatment they mete out to different groups. The first is composed of those who seem to have been endowed by nature with only one ambition—to lead a life of crime. They feel the weight of imprisonment, a longing for their lost liberty, and a desire to rehabilitate themselves by any means, so they bring their wits to bear on the position. These are the cunning scoundrels who have 'taken their degrees' and know the ins and outs of the Communist movement.

Having got over the shock of the first days of imprisonment and

submitted to *t'an-pai t'an-pai*, they expatriate with pride and without any concealment on what they have done in their lives. They take care to please their jailers and show a longing to be instructed in Communist principles. Given the chance, they spy on the behaviour of their companions. They want to be popular at any cost. The Communists need this type, who to their natural depravity add a contemptible servility and, apparently, a real longing to understand Communism. They are segregated and given a special course of instruction. They remain prisoners but in the special category of those who are rehabilitating themselves and profiting by being taught the Communist creed. So their innate desire for a life of crime will be encouraged. This is the explanation of the existence of the trained men who will be the future Political Commissars, or spies. The Communists often try them out and criticize their work every day with the utmost seriousness.

Some of the prisoners occupy posts of some responsibility. They do not belong to any special category in the Communist Party; they remain on the fringe, but have clearly defined activities. Sometimes, because they have been too zealous in carrying out the chiefs' wishes, or by committing immoral actions, they come into collision with the people. The Communists, in order to keep up appearances, will listen to the charges brought against them by the people, and punish them. The fact of having violated a woman does not in practice constitute a crime, though the law recognizes and punishes it. When it happens, the Communists either laugh, or defend the criminal from the general indignation. They know, however, that if they always adopt that attitude the contempt felt by the people will increase dangerously, so they give way. Naturally the imprisonment of such an offender means only a period of amusement and fun, until a change in the situation makes it possible for him to go back to his old post or to be sent to a new one. But despite the efforts of the Communists to conceal such shameless proceedings, the people know what is happening, and their hatred grows every day.

I was able to talk at different times to three or four of the prisoners who were drawing water from the public well. I asked one of them why he was in prison. He replied:

'I only found out the real reason when I was brought here. My father sold medicines and I helped him. The Communists had been looking for a chemist for some time. The chemists in the neighbourhood refused the invitation, saying they were no use, or excusing

themselves very politely. Then the Communists came to our house and finished up by buying some medicine. The next day my father and I were arrested. As my father was old they let him go home, but they kept me.'

I asked how much longer he would be in prison. He replied:

'If I had any money I should already be at home.'

'I don't understand you.'

'Anyone who pays a certain sum of money is let off a month or a year of imprisonment. If I had fifteen thousand dollars, I could pay for the three years I have to be here. Instead . . .'

I asked another prisoner about the jailer.

'He is a fool who sleeps all day, coughs all night and bites like a mad dog.'

I then asked him why he was in prison.

'When they force me to confess or I am tired, I don't know what to say because I still don't know what they want me to say. Perhaps the judge, having bought a new concubine, wants money, but I haven't any.'

I spoke to another, but he must have been one of the ruffians whom I have described, and who had 'taken his degree,' for he did nothing but praise the Communist ideals and constitution. He did not talk like the hotel manager, still less had he the vacant face of the man who was looking for the judge's hen in the courtyard.

All the others, when I asked them what they thought of Communism, answered: 'Old Master, I cannot talk and I beg you not to say that I have spoken to you.'

They put their loads on their shoulders and staggered off to that hated place—the prison.



II *The Mission at Suiyeh: now destroyed*



*Suiyeh: the Springs*

安陽縣私立崇真中小學學生軍成立紀念



III Changte: Pupils of the Catholic Middle School



A Small Village School

## CHAPTER

# 6

*23rd August 1945*

THE chief of police asked me to go to his house; he was ill and needed me.

'Look at this swelling,' he said as I crossed the threshold.

His foot was extraordinarily swollen. I got some water heated, made an incision, and a large amount of pus came out.

All the heads of the Communist police stood round and watched. They treated me like a king and with all the astonishing Chinese etiquette. At noon they gave me a dinner such as few people saw in China at that time. I tried to guess the motive for this treatment, which certainly did not conform to the holy austerity that punishes poor people if they are discovered eating something a little better than usual; nor was it in accord with the teachings of the commissars who cry: 'Death to the rich because they eat well.' So this banquet was provided especially for me. There was also a great deal of wine. They insisted that I should eat and drink a great deal, which annoyed me, especially as I was very distrustful of their intentions. So I ate very little and drank only hot water. Fortunately, there was no conversation about Communism and religion. I went home in company with the judge's secretary and on the way I witnessed a horrible scene—a People's Court.

On a rostrum not very far from the river there was a bound man. Beside it a youth with a cruel face was addressing the crowd. He had a whip in his hands.

'How much land have you received?' he asked the bound man.

'Five perches.'

'Why have you bought another two perches? Aren't five enough for you?'

'No, with a family—'

The youth leapt on the rostrum and whipped him without mercy.

The victim's skin grew red and so swollen that it split under the blows and, a robust man, he bled exceedingly until, with a cry, he fell fainting into his own blood.

'Who sold the land?' shouted the youth, turning to the crowd.

Everyone looked frightened.

'Step forward, whoever sold the land!'

A poor old man advanced hesitatingly. He received a cruel blow in the face, staggered, and sank down crying.

'What have you done, old man? Jump on the platform.'

With kicks and blows, the youth made him get up on that fatal rostrum. I did not know how to control myself, feeling I should faint. I made a sign to those who were with me and went away. I crossed the river, but my legs refused to carry me any further and I sank down on a stone.

'Don't let it upset you,' said the secretary. 'It is a school. When you have seen other People's Courts, they won't upset you. They are necessary because the people have to be trained to adapt themselves to the new order of things.'

'You are brutes!' was my response.

I got up and walked home.

Some days previously, the judge had given us a copy of the Communist legal code. I re-read the chapter about peasants. The law was quite clear: 'Private individuals are free to buy or sell land or buildings . . .' Then what was the meaning of the scene I had just witnessed?

In the evening arrived the Christian who was taking the place of the servant who had gone to fetch the medicines.

'There is important news,' he said. 'The judge has sent an order to the head of the district, forbidding anyone to come and see you. "Look at their permits carefully," it reads. "Watch all those who have come in contact with the Europeans."'

But the Christians had assured us that not even the devil himself would prevent them from coming to see us at least once a week.

The crime of that morning needed an explanation. I questioned this man and his answer was:

'Shenfu, the law says many things, but the Communist idea is to sequestrate all the land and make it State property. The peasants are intimidated by means of these Courts. They may sell, but only to the State and at the price it fixes. It is not the first time there has been a Court like that. The same thing happens in business; the old pro-

priests still work in the shops, but their earnings go to the Communists.'

The usual set of inquisitive people interrupted our conversation. They took a bench and sat down. One of them asked me:

'Tell me, why do your Christians follow you so blindly? Perhaps you give them some special medicine?'

'Yes,' I answered, 'the medicine is here—in the Scriptures.'

'I know them, but I cannot find what *you* find in them.'

'Do you believe that Jesus is God?'

'No.'

'Then you will never find that medicine. You do not wish to find it.'

My questioner suddenly sprang up, gave a heavy sigh and went away, followed by his satellites.

After dinner, we had a long and despondent discussion about our position. This was followed by a night in hell: malaria, atrocious pains in my leg. Perhaps I had walked too much. The swelling, which had seemed to be cured, returned and throbbed incessantly. In my feverish delirium, the thought of suicide flashed into my mind, but only for a second. Misery, desperate homesickness, pessimism such as I have never known in my life, fever, nervousness, all overwhelmed me until I passed into a world of disconnected dreams.

*25th August*

I got up feeling half dazed and very ill. In the middle of the morning, a spasmodic pain in my ears reduced me to an almost comatose state. The two priests were very worried and went to look for the judge, hoping to get permission to send me to Changte, but the judge was not to be found.

As a final misfortune, a Communist arrived and talked for an hour.

'If you want to kill me,' I said, 'do it at once. You do not understand such a thing as kindness.'

He looked at me with a cruel smile.

'I speak in the proper way to speak to people like you. And I don't believe that you really are ill.'

He went away cursing me.

A copious sweat took away my pains as if by magic. In the evening I was able to go out into the courtyard and lie down on a stone, but my weakness and even more, my shivering, forced me to go back to bed. What an ironic sound that word had!

*26th August*

A messenger arrived from the judge with instructions for me to visit the chief of police.

'I can't go,' I replied. 'I am ill.'

'You must,' was the answer.

It was an order and I had to obey, even if on the point of death. I promised to go after dinner, but the messenger insisted and there was no escape.

A beautiful white mule, covered with a quilt and a blanket of flowered woollen material, waited for me at the gate. 'A masquerade,' I thought. 'There must be some other important person who wants me to visit him.' The Communists are capable of a solemn joke.

Two soldiers accompanied me, and everyone stopped to stare at the foreigner on the lovely animal.

'The doctor of the new hospital,' they all said.

Not lacking, however, were sneering grins, but I saw also some Christians who smiled at me with real pleasure, feeling, no doubt, a reflected glory. I visited my illustrious patient. His foot was much less swollen, the fever had disappeared, and he ate with appetite. I washed and bandaged him; then prepared to go home.

'There is another patient for you to visit,' he said.

They took me to the door of a room and asked me to go in. A young woman was waiting for me. God watches over one at every minute, and when the honour of His servants is at stake, His vigilance becomes miraculous. I saw through the trick. The Communists, not having managed to convict me by means of questions, were now trying to do so by means of an experiment. I did not lose my temper. I returned to the doorway and called the two soldiers. The woman immediately got under the bedclothes. The soldiers preceded me into the room. I advanced to the bedside of the so-called invalid.

'No, no, I'm not ill,' she exclaimed, and hid herself under the blankets for shame.

It was useless to make any comment. I returned home. The trick of that loose woman, far from attracting me, merely filled me with repulsion.

*27th August*

The exhaustion of the previous day resulted in my struggling all day against malaria. I asked for a little quinine, but was refused it. Malaria was dreadful, but the visitors were even worse. That day they

came in overwhelming numbers, all with something to say and all wanting answers. There were two Christians who pitied me. One of them had still three quinine pills, which he had saved with religious fervour. Seeing me so ill, he decided to go home at once for the precious medicine—an act that I can only describe as heroic.

*28th August*

My temperature must have been very high during the night. I felt burning, and even the wet rags they put on my head dried up in a few seconds. Early in the morning the Christian arrived with the quinine pills. I took two, feeling as if I was swallowing rocks. I knew what a sacrifice this man had made, but he was happy because he had been able to help me. He stayed with me to comfort and encourage me.

No Communists came. What a mercy it was not to be tormented! Even the malaria disappeared and, profiting by my improvement, I was able to collect my thoughts and write a little.

★ ★ ★

I have been in the power of the Communists (I wrote) for some time. In my capacity as doctor (!) I have seen people of all kinds at close quarters, from the Party leaders to simple peasants. I cannot say that among the leaders I have ever seen one who was in good faith. I have therefore dared to reach a rather alarming conclusion. It seems to me that I have to divide Communist society into three classes. The first consists of people with nervous expressions, who suddenly become suspicious and seem always on the verge of saying, 'Who goes there?' Their conversation is confused, they make statements and deny them with equal readiness; and if by any chance they smile, it gives the impression of a stormy sky illuminated by a sinister light. In fact, when I go near them, I am afraid. The second class, recruited from the novices in crime, are those who have not entirely lost all human beliefs. These easily betray themselves by some remembrance of—some longing for—the past. They could still be saved if iron fetters did not compel them to engage in a perpetual struggle against all natural goodness, pity and civilized behaviour. With tired faces, sunken eyes, quick gusts of anger, they are suspicious of everybody and everything. It is very difficult to understand their interminable speeches, or the meaning of what they say. They are at the beginning, the tragic period of their training to become Communists. To the continual struggle to observe the iron rules scrupulously must be

added the unceasing effort to achieve the complete elimination of their own personalities. They are so unfortunate that when I find myself face to face with them I feel as if I am watching the disintegration of a building.

Occasionally I have dared to ask for news of their families, and I have always had the same answer: 'Mind your own business.' Or they give me a threatening look and hasten away, as if my words have awokened forbidden, dangerous thoughts. More than once I have been warned: 'When you visit our sick, take care you do not take too much interest in their private affairs.'

The third class consists of the miserable, the defeated, the grey mass lying beneath the iron heel of Communism, to be treated as it likes. To this class belong the desperate, who shout to the beat of the conductor's baton, and the poor, who, not wishing or knowing what to shout, hang in agony between life and death. For this class the other two work with zeal—enough the principle, 'All for the people.'

Even a superficial study of this third class shows the repulsive reality of Communism. The leaders need money? Among the people are the rich, the money-lenders, the consciousless, the profiteers, the rebels, the traitors, the murderers, the enemies of the country, the criminals, the discontented—the dregs that must disappear; and there is the money! The army needs help in an attack on the walls of a city held by the enemy? The people are always ready to give their bodies to serve as shields for the troops, and the platform for the capture of the city. The soldiers need slippers? The women make them at once. A demonstration for the benefit of a foreigner who wants to see, to report? A roll on a drum, an order, and the people assemble for an 'imposing' display, and the foreigner departs, lauding the work of the Communists.

I have always heard it said that there are three grades in the Party, though I still find it hard to distinguish them, so veiled are they in mystery. Nobody dares to speak of them; anyone rash enough to do so dies under torture—torture that may last for a week or a month, according to the case.

I have learned a great lesson in this prison. I am a priest and I know that suspicion is a feeling that is unworthy of me. Very often I have been obliged to combat this psychological obsession about the exhibitions of brutality of the Communist world: that the crimes committed every day before my eyes, and the cunning of men whose lives are based on the most shameless lies, are all caused by an internal

travail. In the beginning, I forced myself to excuse or pity this apocalyptic (I cannot find a better word) human depravity; but I felt, despite my goodwill, that my conscience refused to allow me to indulge in such an emotion. It seemed to me that the wish to pity, to excuse everything, was to palliate, to approve so many abominable actions. It was an agonizing compromise, from which I could not free myself. Was it weakness on my part? One thing was clear: that every suspicion I entertained was immediately confirmed by the brutal reality.

There pass before my mind's eye, one after another, the three classes I have described, and I do not think I am mistaken when I say that in them I found, well-defined and clear, the three grades of the Communist party. Those who have, or appear to have, stifled their consciences for ever and are ready for any wickedness are the *élite*—in the first grade. 'They have destroyed themselves,' the people say. They are lost in a Communist Nirvana. They are the so-called *Mofan*,<sup>1</sup> who direct the movement, who fill the highest posts, who rule as despots and, when they wish to do so, behave as tyrants. No obstacles stop them, nothing can deter them from accomplishing their sinister schemes.

I have the prototype of these detestable beings before my eyes—the mandarin's secretary. I have been able to get to know him through a strange misunderstanding. A week or two ago, someone in the mandarin's office sent for me. I went, taking some medicine with me. I entered the mysterious courtyard and waited for some time. Everybody stared at me, but no one dared to address a word to me. After waiting for about two hours, I heard a nervous voice through a half-open door:

'What is that European devil doing here? There are no sick. Take him to the mandarin's secretary.'

Accompanied by the soldier who had come to fetch me, I wandered through doorways, passages, courtyards, until we finally arrived in a clean, fine courtyard. A young woman seated in a corner was eating a bowl of millet soup. In front of me, a half-open door attracted my attention.

'That man you see inside, seated to the right of the table,' said the soldier, 'is the secretary.' And he coughed loudly.

The secretary looked up, but did not move. I turned my back to the door, thinking I might be more patient if I could find something to

<sup>1</sup> Model, i.e. model Communists.

interest me. I did not dare to move a step, having the impression that if I did so the atmosphere might change. When I least expected it, the secretary came out. His glassy eyes, his cruel smile, his contracted mouth—these made me think that perhaps it would have been better if I had not come.

‘What do you want?’ he said. ‘Who brought you here?’

The woman, who had given the soldier a wicked look when he had pointed the secretary out to me, now said: ‘He did.’

The poor fellow tried to explain.

‘Go away! Go away at once!’ the secretary said to me, adding to the soldier: ‘You stay here.’

He disappeared into the dark room. I came home, shaken by the thought that I had dared to approach such a famous man, and one of whom the people were so frightened. I have heard no more of the unknown invalid or the soldier. I met the secretary again some days later crossing the river; the only impression he made on me was of two glassy eyes. Given his fame as a Communist hero and a model secretary, he enjoys great authority and power in the inner circles of the Party.

During my years in China I have come into contact with bandits, with bad characters, but not one of them has aroused such aversion in me as the Communists. I have often pondered on the reason for this. The explanation seems to be that the first are occasionally influenced by good feelings. They have taken to bad ways for material reasons—to make money—and, though they commit crimes, they do not wish to enforce their way of life on others, nor do they regard it as normal. But the Communist uses crime as the basis for the reconstruction of society.

The disciples—the most obsequious followers, those who execute the leaders’ orders—form a class by themselves; and the distinction between the heads and their bloodhounds is very clear. As a doctor I have permission to enter (always accompanied and watched) all circles high and low, when anyone has need of my services. Despite the efforts made by the Communists to hide the realities of the situation from a ‘European devil’ fundamentally opposed to their principles, it is not difficult to notice for example the way one of the *élite* behaves to another, and the way the *élite* behave to everyone else. I have seen one clearly defined category of persons enter certain circles, usually to give an account of themselves, to report what they have done, and the results obtained in carrying out their duties. They are received

with a show of cordiality, so as to make a good impression on them, but it is easy to see that they are humble and trembling slaves. This, too, is part of Communist education; those who know how to stand up to it and control themselves may hope, some day or other, to be declared *Mofan* and in time to pass from the second to the first grade in the Party.

This second grade, which may be regarded as conversant with the mysteries of Communism, is composed of Political Commissars, spies, propagandists, and schoolmasters who, in teaching the people, have given concrete proofs of complete devotion to Communism—those, in fact, who have abandoned their intellectual integrity and their own personalities, so as to think and desire what their leaders think and desire. At regular intervals they have their own special meetings. For the 'novice' who attends for the first time, it is a terrible experience.

One day I received an urgent call from Hochien.

'Come at once. Our propagandist is ill.'

'What is the matter?' I dared to ask.

'Fool,' was the answer, 'come and see.'

They demanded two things of me: that I should come and cure in the same moment. It was unpleasant to be compelled to act as a magician. I went. A girl of twenty, suffering from a severe nervous shock, was lying on a stone table in the middle of the courtyard. While I was attending to the poor thing, I heard someone shouting as if possessed. I thought that perhaps it was some relative of hers.

'No,' they told me, 'it is our leader exhorting us to do our duty.'

'He must be full of energy, this leader of yours.'

I did not know what they would make of this remark. Obviously it would not please those who were suspicious by nature. One of those present said something and they all went away. Others were sent to take their places. No one spoke a word and I was careful not to open my mouth. The girl came to herself and her first words were:

'Go away, go away! Let me go home! Traitors!'

A man said with a smile: 'Mi-la.' ('She is out of her mind.') Turning to me he added: 'Thank you. You can go.'

It was a command. I left the courtyard and, accompanied by a soldier, set off back to prison. We crossed the river. Night had fallen, and the three words, 'You can go,' rang in my head. I was sure that if I had stayed I should have heard a confession that I ought not to have heard. I wanted to know something about the girl, so I remarked to the soldier:

'Poor thing, how she was suffering! I am sorry for her.'

'Yes,' he replied, 'her heart is too soft and she has not much courage. She arrived only a few days ago from Tientsin, and she is not yet accustomed to our meetings, but she will get accustomed.'

What significant words. Poor girl, I see her in a sack full of serpents that will coil themselves round her for ever, unless she kills herself as so many others have done.

While the members of the first grade are united by a friendship that is often sincere, for they do not envy each other, the link between the members of the second grade is the bitterest hatred and a deep mutual suspicion. They know that they are followed, spied upon, criticized at every moment of the day. They all know that watchers' eyes are on them, but they do not know to whom those eyes belong. A small fault, an indiscreet word, a little carelessness, an act of pity during a People's Court, might ruin them for ever. Perhaps two propagandists are on the same road and have the same task, one spying on the other. Perhaps that shy silent girl has been placed beside the People's Commissar to report on his conduct and to bring some accusation against him. Perhaps that companion who talks with such longing of the old days, of freedom, of his distant family, or his home, is more dangerous than a Japanese ambush. The secret instruction each receives is based on a principle of capital importance: 'Create men who are suspicious of everything and everybody.' The practical result is astonishing, but it is not achieved without unceasing surveillance and careful selection.

But even the cordiality that exists between members of the first grade is not liked by Communism and is watched. Among the many activities of the second grade is spying on members of the first grade. Who are the fortunate men chosen for this delicate and dangerous work? Usually no one knows, not even the *élite*. This is the explanation of the fundamentally insincere friendliness shown by those in the first grade to those in the second.

Later on, I shall perhaps have an opportunity to describe the punishments inflicted on those who transgress the sacred laws of the Party, on those suspected of insufficient zeal, of undue timidity, etc. For the moment, let us imagine what life must be like for persons perpetually preyed upon by suspicion, by the uncertainty of what may happen from one moment to another; tormented by doubts. 'Have I done right? Have I done badly? Can I hope to be commended . . . or shall I be executed?' It is terrifying to think of the strain. 'Living

with a rope round one's neck,' as the Chinese say. The relentless machine of fate carries them to the edge of the precipice, and they try as far as possible to accustom themselves to this existence—and fail.

The real tragedy lies in the fact that perhaps in their hearts most of them detest these crimes. Let them dare to open their mouths! To make the situation still more grim, the Chinese character, or at least the traditional character, tends, I think, to fatalism.

The activities and energies of the first and second grades sweep like a destructive flood over the third—the people. No description will convey its effect; it must be seen to be believed. The people are compelled not only to give their names to the Party, but also to have membership cards. What a mockery! When the occupation of a zone is completed, the people automatically join the Party, willingly or unwillingly, clever or imbecile, high or low—and they all have duties thrust upon them. The right, for example, of electing the head of the village. But as they are 'ignorant,' it is necessary to teach and guide them in such an important matter. If the head of the village can boast of almost a hundred per cent of the votes, but is not liked—or, at least, tolerated—by the Party, he is replaced by another, who understands Communist ideals and so can govern the people 'justly.'

Here is a concrete example. When this district fell under the domination of the Reds, the old district council was dissolved. The Commissar addressed the people, winding up with these fine phrases:

'You must elect persons who understand the problems of to-day. The rich will no longer tyrannize over you, for now you are in control. Your village must be one family, so take care whom you choose as your head.'

The people took him at his word, unanimously electing a relative of the family with whom we were living at the time of our abortive escape—an elderly man who enjoyed everyone's respect for his natural goodness and honesty.

It so happened that he belonged to the best-known family in the district, and when the Commissar heard of his election he flew into a rage. He cursed the district during an open meeting and then withdrew. The people, still not understanding Communist tactics, were confused and frightened. Someone more courageous than the rest defended the district. He should never have done that! One person after another was killed after being tortured. The new head of the village was removed from office and, by order of the Commissar, no one else was elected. A chaotic interregnum ensued. As there was no

responsible authority, orders issued by the state were not circulated; neither the taxes nor the money for the upkeep of the army were collected. No women made slippers for the soldiers. As if by magic, all local organizations disappeared, and there were no public meetings.

'A delightful situation,' said the people. 'The Communists have forgotten the existence of the district.'

They did not know how disastrous the results would be.

On the suggestion of the deposed head, gifts were collected, and a deputation of the most respected inhabitants went to ask for pardon. They were not received. They went again, but it was useless. The suffering of the district increased until finally the Communists decided that the iron was hot. They sent a *Kung-tso-yuan*—a People's Commissar—who made the people understand how wicked they had been.

'But,' he said, 'we pity you because we know that there are many things you do not understand. Make reparation and we shall be friends.'

The reparations were: (a) the supplying of a great amount of corn to cover the unpaid taxes and the money for the army; and (b) the acceptance of a head of the district chosen by the *Kung-tso-yuan*. But the matter did not end there, and even to-day a threat still hangs over the district.

Another right was to be religious freedom, but while this is proclaimed, the people are compelled to destroy the pagodas and the temples, hallowed by tradition and the memories of their ancestors. The Communist reason for this action is that 'religion is a waste of time.' It is useless to comment. Plain to see is the destruction of those rights that every individual and every state that calls itself civilized should enjoy, unless by 'rights' one means something that the good sense of humanity never discovered before the reign of Communism.

As history shows, there has always been in every revolution a smaller or greater number of agitators who, by cunning and the disregard of every law and the dictates of their own consciences, manage to rise to the surface. They enjoy a brief hour of triumph and disappear. The forces of evil cannot overcome the forces of good, just as materialism will never overcome the power of the spirit. The criminals are bound to disappear when confronted by the anger of the mass of the people demanding justice.

Communism, however, understands the explosive power of human passions and makes use of this force to impose itself and destroy the majority, which consists of decent reasonable people. To achieve its purpose, it is essential for it to use every means to incite the dregs of

society to create still more confusion, and this can be done only with the help of the members of the third grade.

The Chinese people are not capable of certain exhibitions of brutality that we see in our so-called intelligent western world. I am speaking of the Chinese who live far from the great cities and are not yet corrupted by the superficial influences of our civilization. What happened at Canton and Shanghai when Communist propaganda began in China, and the scandalous processions of naked women in Hankow in 1927, were only exhibitionism on the part of foolish students who had either studied in Europe or been under the influence of pseudo-luminaries of our civilization, or else were engaged in copying the methods of western strikers.

Those who witnessed the demonstrations were shocked, and at the same time they noticed the general indifference of the crowd, which showed how little sympathy it had with such conduct. To overcome this indifference, the Communists decided to make use of the hot-heads who exist in all communities. The third grade is therefore divided into categories; one consists of the far greater number of people who are anti-Communist and only wish to live peaceably and cultivate the land; the others are filibusters who are incited to find an outlet for their most depraved instincts by ill-treating their defenceless fellow citizens. So betrayals, accusations, torture are the order of the day. Heart-rending cries resound, mingled with horrible curses. The terrified eyes of children look at one with hatred, and if one asks, 'What are those cries? Why so much blood?' the repulsive and cynical answer is, 'We are educating the people.' Communism needs blood.

I hate the Communist newspaper, not because every day it has news that gets on my nerves, but because the advance of Communism fills me with profound alarm. This would not matter if there were not something worse, which wounds me to the soul. 'In district A, the people have been awakened by the light of Communism and now they are beginning to enjoy their regained liberty'; 'In village B, the people have risen unanimously against their betrayers'; 'In district C, where formerly the people lived like animals, they spend the days working and singing.' This infamous travesty of the truth goes on, and it is nourished by the blood of the people. Poor China! It sings, certainly—it sings the tragic story of the 'marten forced to die of thirst before a bowl of poisoned water.' This is the truth that the people confide to us, because they say:

'You are different from them.'

Often they do not really need medicine from me, but an opportunity to pour out their hatred of the butchers; it is this that makes them come to our prison. There are certain words one can always say and their effect is very surprising and consoling, both to him who speaks and to those who listen: 'But there are still good people in this world. . . . It is not true that the Old Grandfather in the Sky has disappeared for ever.' As the tears course down their furrowed cheeks, which often bear the marks of torture, the words seem to revivify these walking corpses. In practice the people enjoy no rights, while in theory Communism is 'for the people.'

The ironical climax is reached by the fact that this theory is solemnly set forth in writing. The trick would be too obvious if there were not a good legal code that serves at least to throw dust in the eyes of the public. It does; it will do. The judge's soldiers join their voices with those of the prisoners and all sing (an excellent way of driving away melancholy of a subversive nature), praising Mao Tse-tung and Communism.

Involuntarily I raised my hand from the dirty piece of paper on which I am writing these impressions, and my mind crossed mountains and seas to my own country. 'If I could fly with my thoughts to Italy,' I said to myself, 'and tell people in person what I am writing, should I be believed?'

The miserable picture of social injustice is followed by another even more distressing. Deprived of any rights, the poor people are weighed down by an interminable series of duties. To ensure that these are faithfully performed, Communism unleashes its watch-dogs. It is an exhausted flock, helpless and imprisoned by the forces of evil, that trudges down the fatal road.

'There is no remedy, Old Master. To avoid greater evils, it is better to obey. The soldiers pass through and need wood, water, accommodation. We must provide them all. To-day it is the mandarin who wants millet, corn, cotton; to-morrow it will be somebody else. Do they want to take a town? They need men. The *Kuchang* (head of the district) sends word and we must appear. They do not give us arms; we must provide them for ourselves—and not only arms, but food.'

'What do they give you in payment?' I asked.

'Old Master, the greatest reward is permission to go home.'

During my imprisonment I have seen two attacking forces set out. Perhaps they were not on a large scale, for only men from twenty-five to thirty years of age were called up, but the bustle of preparation was

immense. Rifles were cleaned—such deplorable rifles! Men hunted for wire to fasten the barrels to the wooden butts. I saw some with plates, ‘Brussels, 1868,’ ‘Germany,’ but no date. There were even some Italian rifles dating from the 1915 war. The men who had no rifles hung locally made hand-grenades from their belts. Others prepared ropes and ladders to scale the walls of the city. When I watched them starting, it was like seeing a flock of lambs being driven to the butcher’s. Fear drove them on and there was no exemption. The only escape was death, and some of them thought even of that.

That is the position of the third grade of the Party.

What a picture! How great is the barbarous wickedness of man when he is in the grip of evil principles! How long will this last?

★ ★ ★

Towards evening, a terrible thunderstorm broke over the village. In our magnificent residence, water, earth, and tiles descended on us. With blankets under our arms, looking as if we were playing blind man’s bluff, we searched for a corner that was less wet, but the roof leaked like a sieve, and we had to resign ourselves to the cascades of water that descended on us. It was a poor consolation that those faithful companions of ours, the insects, were compelled to seek drier quarters.

*29th August*

The servant arrived with the letters, but, as we had arranged, without the medicines. The judge would be very annoyed. It would seem very strange to him that it was not possible to enter Changte, but this lie could not incriminate us, for had not he told us himself that the town was about to fall into the hands of the Communists?

While the servant went to the judge to report on his journey, we opened the letters with great excitement. In one, the vicar of the Mission gave me—or rather renewed—his permission for me to continue to act as a doctor. So, thanks to my work, and with a little prudence on my part, I hoped that things would go better, according to God’s will.

The judge arrived; his eyes looking more natural than usual—that was, less benign—and he did not chatter so much. He knew the trick we had played, but he did not choose to refer to it. The time had not yet come.

*30th August*

Another summons from the chief of police. His foot was obviously better and I wanted to leave at once, but there were others who wished to be examined. The first was the mandarin himself—or so I was told by the man who had accompanied me. As he was there incognito, I did not dare to make any polite speeches. He was dressed like everyone else—a jacket and a pair of grey trousers. His mysterious face had no striking features, except the eyes, which were small and lively. He seemed bored by the questions I asked him about the state of his health, and answered very cautiously, almost under his breath. I did not know if his uneasiness was caused by my presence or by the presence of his junior officers, who stood round like so many sphinxes, more curious about my examination than about their chief's illness.

'You are suffering from syphilis,' I told him.

He accepted the verdict with the indifference of a man worried about other things. He put on his jacket, took his cap from one of those standing by, and went away without taking the slightest notice of anyone.

I examined the others. Nearly all were suffering from syphilis, stomach troubles or malaria. Finally, they took me to see a woman, a People's Commissar, who had been wounded a few days previously.

'I hope to be able to do you some good,' I said.

She gave me a piteous look as if she wanted to say, 'Cure me and you will see that I will go home.'

When I returned I found two people talking to Father Perottoni. I knew the faces of the cunning rogues. I sat down and, without any preamble, they began to ask me questions—what the Pope does, how he is elected, whether he has an army, etc. They knew a good deal of European history, especially ecclesiastical. The fallacies they tried to conceal under specious arguments were the stock ones and therefore easy to refute. The discussion ran on two lines; historical and materialistic.

There were some difficult moments. When one of them had been proved wrong the other took up the argument; and it was necessary to be careful not to contradict oneself. The discussion lasted for two hours and my head began to swim. Finally, they exhausted their stock of subjects, got up, shook hands, and promised to come back the next day.

We reviewed their arguments and our own and prepared for the morrow. Unable to sleep I went out into the courtyard. The honour



IV *Ma-tsiao: an old Imperial Country-seat*



*Tienchiaching: the Sanctuary of the Virgin, built by Catholic missionaries and still standing*



v. Four Orphans in Winter Clothing



Group of Chinese Orphans

of the Church was at stake, therefore every sacrifice had to be made. What I had said was the truth and so the struggle was inevitable. One of the two men had actually referred to St. Paul. Poor creature, if he only knew that writer! The hours passed. At two in the morning, tired and mentally exhausted, I retired to bed.

*31st August*

I went to see my patients. The young woman commissar was better, though much pus was still coming away. She cried and begged me to cure her. I treated her as I had done the first day, and, there being no one else present, took the opportunity to ask her some questions. She said that she was twenty-six, but she did not tell me where she came from. She had left home at nineteen to go to the Catholic University in Peking, but, unfortunately, had eluded the care that would have saved her from dangerous friendships. Now she had only one desire—to spread the Red creed.

'I must save my people,' she cried, 'and as you have given up everything, even marriage, for an ideal, so I must give up everything for Communism, which is the only thing that will save the world.'

I was alarmed at this outburst, and to put an end to the discussion, I told her not to talk and to keep quiet if she wished to get well.

On the way back, I met a good Christian from Tienchiaching, who was returning from a lecture given to the heads and senior officials of the Party.

'Every time I go to these meetings,' he said, 'I think I am going to faint. Three People's Commissars were punished.'

I asked him about that terrible race of people.

'They are the most unfortunate of all. Trained to vice and crime, they work under the orders of the Communists with ever-increasing ferocity. The success or failure of the propaganda depends on them, so they are spied upon and followed everywhere. A mere breath of suspicion is enough to cause their arrest. Once in prison, every week, every day, according to their crime, someone visits them and conducts a terrible examination that may last uninterruptedly for days. All they have done, good and bad, during their lives must be laid bare before these inquisitors. Some of the commissars, if they think they are suspected, succeed in escaping, but they are few. Almost all collapse under the torture of this examination. The only happy ones are those who somehow contrive to kill themselves in prison. Those who succeed in this career more horrible than death are few and they

will become the mandarins, the heads of zones, the leaders of the Party.'

*1st September*

'We are the saviours of the world.' 'We are the star of the people.' These words were written in gigantic letters on all the walls. To-day I saw how the Communists put these slogans into practice.

Accompanied by a soldier, I walked through the village of Nanho. All the inhabitants were collected round a People's Commissar, who was shouting and gesticulating. It was quite simple. A poor man, having managed to earn a few pennies, had bought a lamb. Before evening, the Communist propagandist had heard of this and declared it a crime. This morning he had insisted on everyone appearing in front of the ruined pagoda.

'There is a criminal among you—a man who has money. You must discover who he is.'

The people stood terrified, none daring to speak. The demagogue took another line:

'Who bought a lamb yesterday?'

In a small village it is not difficult to discover who has bought a lamb, and very soon the unhappy merchant was summoned onto the platform—a kind of stage used for plays.

I wanted to watch this scene, but the soldier urged me to go on because my patients were waiting for me. I came back in the evening by the same road and, when I reached the pagoda, was astonished to see that the people were still there, though not the commissar. On the platform was a bound, naked man, his head streaming with blood.

'What has happened?' I asked a bystander.

His only answer was to hurry away, a very significant action. If he had been caught talking he might have suffered for it. I stopped, for I wanted to see the end of this tragedy.

'Confess your sin!' shouted two or three young men, 'Where did you get the money to buy the lamb?'

Good God, it was the same prisoner I had seen that morning! The unfortunate man had been on the platform ever since, with all the inhabitants of the village still present, maybe to spend days and nights there—and this because 'the people must understand that they are the ones who govern.' I heard cries; the man was being beaten.

'Confess your sin!'

'I bought a lamb. . . . I earned the money selling a little fruit.'

'It is a lie. You must tell the truth.'

Evening fell. The babies were crying; the tired faces of the women showed their physical and moral suffering. Everyone felt, 'To-morrow it will be my turn.'

The victim in desperation, knowing that all was lost, said in a thin thread of a voice:

'Yes, I stole the money.'

The crowd gave a shout of joy.

'He has confessed! Now we can go home.'

An old man pushed forward.

'No, you have never stolen. If only I had given you the blood of a tiger!'

At this terrible curse, the commissar came out of hiding. (His presence is unnecessary. The people must be free to administer justice.) He seized the old man and dragged him through the crowd, shouting:

'All members of this family have been tried and condemned.'

The scene that followed made my blood run cold. Some women relatives of the prisoner tore their hair, scratched their faces; and babies, suddenly terrified, began to scream. Hatred burned in the people's eyes, but they had to remain there and shout for the death of the innocent. I could not bear it any longer and left that place of shame and wickedness.

### 2nd September

To-day even the chief of police began to show his claws. He asked me questions, some serious, some facetious, about religion, to which I could hardly bring myself to reply. They were not personal, but affected the honour of God, and I said:

'Who is this *Lao-T'ien-Yeh*—this Old Grandfather in the Sky? How is it that educated and uneducated alike believe in this Supreme Being? If He does not exist, why are you happy when you do good and unhappy when you do evil?'

The answer was a sardonic smile. He patted me on the shoulder and suggested that I should talk about other things.

I tried, as I had done on all the other occasions, to slip in some words so that I might influence him, just as I had done with the wounded woman commissar. But, as always, the reply was a smile. I had, however, noticed that it was not an ordinary smile; there was no doubt that what I had said had made an impression.

I got back about midday. On the way, the judge's secretary, who

was with me, gave me a newspaper. It appeared that the Communist 4th Army had been well beaten. There was a long article praising Italian Communists. Poor Italy if it were true! The rest of the paper consisted of nothing but a torrent of abuse of the Nationalist government because it would not accept the tenets of Communism. Mao Tse-tung, the Communist leader, had been taken by the Americans to Chungking, to discuss a compromise between the Nationalist and Communist parties. I was not very optimistic.

In the courtyard there were a lot of sick persons, some looking rather apprehensive. I tried to do my best and treated them all with kindness. The local people had heard of our presence and spoke of us as miracle-workers. When I walked along the country roads, the peasants would run up and ask for advice and medical hints.

'Isn't he the Communist doctor? . . . Why is he so unlike the rest of them? . . . He doesn't want money. . . . He is always smiling.'

Unfortunately, some who came to me for the first time could not hide a vague sense of shyness and fear. Many began with an awkward and insincere profession of faith in Communist principles; others preferred to remain silent; some—and they were the simplest types, not being able to resist the temptation to talk—expressed their horror and disgust at Communist laws.

When they began to understand us, they poured out their laments. And often to the words on the healing of the body were added others for the healing of the soul. Very often it was these that healed both. Spoken by a ragged—and, it is to be feared—a dirty man, they were words that all can repeat, but not all can say with the divine passion that belongs to the missionary.

### *3rd September*

Midnight. I heard a drum being beaten. Something important was on hand, everyone having to attend the meeting called. At about five o'clock in the morning the people went home, having had to collect fighting men and corn. We did not know it then, but an attack on Changte was being planned.

While I was with the chief of police, I learnt that the mandarin had left for some important meeting. I got more definite news from the woman commissar. She begged me to cure her quickly because: 'Our lives are those of soldiers, and the people are not yet free, so one must always be ready.'

They were obviously preparing for a battle, and not very far off.

Perhaps the Communist schoolmaster knew something. I went to see him. He did not know how to answer my questions and began to talk about the education of boys.

'The time has gone for the old system in school; now the best pupil is the most arrogant one. The master is of no importance. He must limit himself to explanations. The boys run the school.'

In reply to my comments he added:

'The chief desire of the new government is to improve the condition of the boy, for this absolute liberty is essential. He is a man like other men. Teaching is difficult, especially at the moment.'

Having said this, he went away as if afraid of having said too much.

*4th September*

An urgent call. The head of the chamber of commerce was very ill. I was received very kindly, five or six people fussing over me. When I asked for the sick man, they took me into a little room filled with knicknacks, carpets, hangings, fine woollen blankets. Good heavens, what people the Communists are! Here was anything but equality.

The man lay on the bed as if dead. A little ammonia under his nose, and he came to life, to the general astonishment of the onlookers. All the members of the chamber of commerce, young fellows of from eighteen to twenty years of age, were present. There were two or three who wanted me to visit them. Meanwhile the sick man revived completely and looked at me through half-opened eyes. We knew each other. Some days before when I had been walking with the judge's secretary, he had cursed me. I could have had my revenge by leaving him to himself, but charity compelled me to care for him as if he were a friend. Could he understand—or at least imagine—the true charity known only to those under the care of a shepherd who was not his shepherd? I smiled at him. He wanted to talk, but I forbade him, leaving him with a promise to return the next day.

*5th September*

I got up with the fixed idea that I was going mad—a kind of obsession that persecuted me all day.

I was going out when two of my bitterest antagonists appeared. They were the most complete materialists, talking French and English very well, having studied in France and been in Germany.

'We owe our chance of study to Communism, to which you are so

opposed. The true gospel is that of Stalin. You say you love the people. Would you be capable of denying your God, your own soul? Certainly not, because you are a slave to your false gospel.'

I replied: 'I have never been able to understand why, if you deny the existence of God, of the soul, of duty, you have the cause of the people so much at heart. Man acts only when he sees some personal gain in his sacrifice, and even the most false ideology tends to this. Why do you end all your meetings with acts of such cruelty?'

'Scoundrel!' said one. 'Take back those words!'

'No,' said the other, 'let him speak.'

'I do not think,' I went on, 'that you behave in a reasonable way. You deny the existence of the spirit. You say that all is matter, and, therefore, that it is right and logical that you should use this matter as you like, whether it is called man, animal, or stone.'

They sprang up in a rage, one pointing a revolver at me.

'This is the only argument for you!'

I was not alarmed and said quietly:

'Do as you like. But remember that you invited this discussion, and discussions are carried on by words, not by weapons.'

I freed myself from these tormentors and threw myself on my bed, a prey to terrible mental weariness.

'This is a sign of madness,' I said to myself.

*7th September*

What I feared had happened. The newspaper announced the fall of Wuan and said many nice things about the Church, describing the priests who lived there as 'our two Italian friends.' I thought I could see the reason for this change of tone: what had happened to us had made a sensation among the people in general, who were angry at the way the Communists had treated us, and spoke of us with pity and sympathy. It was natural that the Communist scoundrels should run for cover.

I was with the head of the chamber of commerce, and everyone was talking of the victory. I, too, offered my congratulations, but privately I was disgusted. They asked me if I knew the two missionaries.

'Very well, and I beg you to be kind to them.'

They took this quite seriously and replied:

'But we are not brigands. We know how to treat our foreign friends, especially Italians, because we know that in Italy the people are no longer slaves and that they want to live in freedom.'

The chief of police was now quite well, and the woman commissar better.

*8th September*

I watched two People's Courts that behaved quite kindly, the two victims being condemned to death without having to undergo the usual tortures. One was beheaded, the other buried alive.

I went to see some sick people, calling first of all on the woman commissar.

'She is no longer here,' I was told.

The Communists, seeing that she was better, had taken her somewhere else, and they would not tell me where. I protested:

'To move a wounded person in that state is criminal.'

'Do your duty,' was the reply, 'and don't meddle in things that don't concern you.'

From what I heard and from broken sentences, I felt that the girl had been taken away for very serious reasons. She had recently asked me a great many questions and had not concealed her gratitude; she had even enquired if it was possible to save one's soul. I prayed that God would touch her heart. This was probably the cause of her disappearance.

*9th September*

The paper announced that Shunte, the flourishing vicariate of the Polish missionaries, had been taken. The Communist triumphs were increasing and the Nationalist troops did not arrive.

The head of the chamber of commerce was in very good spirits, happy at being well again. He thanked me warmly, adding:

'I was treated previously by a German and then by an American, but though the medicines were the same, it seemed to me that this time they were stronger, and gave me more energy. When you come, I feel well.'

I did not know why he spoke to me with this exaggerated politeness, and I thought: 'Well, then, I must be a very different person from the European whom you cursed a few days ago. If only you meant what you said."

After dinner there were more arguments. One of my inquisitors said to me:

'You talk like this because your mind has not yet been opened. Remember that, from now onwards, you will not be able to argue in this way. What the State wants is right and you must obey!'

'I do not think that I have failed to obey, but I know that the State allows free discussion.'

'What do you know about the law?'

'At least more than you do!'

The argument became rather heated, and the other two took their friend by the arm and tried to pacify him.

'Cursed Italian,' he shouted at me, 'one can't argue with you!'

And he spat in my face, which amused them all very much.

I do not know why, but this disgusting behaviour made a strange impression on me. It seemed to cover me like a black veil. . . . Suddenly the veil was rent asunder and I saw the abyss that yawned between me and my questioner. What produced this reaction?

Divine help became clearer to me and I enjoyed this insult. Called upon to put into practice the command in the Gospel, I felt I had succeeded and was happy. The words of the Gospel telling me not to think how I should answer when they took me before a judge, for the Holy Spirit would answer for me, had saved me.

*10th September*

Two poor girls, accompanied by an old man, arrived in the morning to be treated. They had heard that we would not accept money, so had brought a little flour, two hens, nuts and fruit. Poor things, I did my best to cure them.

The good old man, the girls' grandfather, did not know how to express his gratitude.

'I know who you are. You are good—different from those people.'

He pointed to the judge's house. We did not need many words to understand each other. The topic of the wickedness of the Communists was soon abandoned and, without noticing, we began to talk about religion. He listened to me with joy and wonder.

'How happy I should be,' he said, 'if I could understand what you understand.'

'Old brother, why do you not become a Christian?'

'Oh, I am old and my brain is no longer any use.'

They wanted to leave, but a sudden thunderstorm forced them to stay. I talked to the man, who was a Christian without knowing it. What a difference between the simplicity and goodness of these people and the arrogance of the Communists!

*11th September*

It rained all day. Every receptacle for catching water was full. The rain poured in everywhere and plaster began to fall. The previous night had really been quite amusing. A mat and a blanket under my arm, I had wandered about the room in search of some less dangerous corner. By morning we were all soaked, as were our books, the flour, our rags. Even the ink had become the colour of water. In the courtyard there was a lake, and the rain continued.

*12th September*

It rained for another night and day. Some enormous scorpions fell from the ceiling, the most frightening of the animals in this Noah's ark. Blessed rain! It kept the Communists away.

I put something over my head and went into the porch. I did not see a living soul. The whole valley was a sea of white mist, and every now and then there was a flash of lightning and the thunder echoed in a melancholy way along the ravines and clefts in the massive range of mountains.

A little boy appeared with a small trident and a sack. He crept nervously along beside the walls, hunting for scorpions—a most valuable medicine in Chinese therapeutics.

In the evening we held a council. In addition to the discomfort caused by the rain that poured in, there was the danger of the roof descending on our heads. A wall of the house was leaning outwards and in one corner there was a crack as broad as one's hand. Should we ask the judge to find us a better hovel?

*13th September*

Day and night it rained in torrents. The people were in despair about the millet, which was being ruined.

There was almost a death in the family. The mistress of the house, whom we called *La Moresina*,<sup>1</sup> because she was so sluggish, was ill in bed and eating nothing. For the Chinese, when a sick person does not eat, it is a very serious matter. Poor woman, she had been so kind and done so many things for us. I wanted to go and see her, but did not dare. In China, a visit to a woman is a very tricky business.

<sup>1</sup> 'The Slowcoach.'

## CHAPTER

# 7

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14th September 1945

THE rain never stopped. After dinner the judge arrived in a bad temper, his nervous tic (a very rare thing among the Chinese) almost making him stammer.

While he talked he stared about him, his rheumy, malicious eyes examining everything with the shrewdness of a clever policeman. He seemed to be saying to us:

'Those four potatoes came from such and such a person—those nuts from your Christians in Tienchiaching. . . . That millet. . . . And that little basket. . . . Ah, you scoundrels, I told you to ask the people for money. . . . I want money.'

I thought him both funny and frightening. Our eyes met; perhaps we were both thinking the same thing.

'When,' he asked, 'will the servant be back with the medicines?'

'Poor people,' I replied. 'If this rain goes on—'

'You are right. Perhaps he is held up by the floods.'

That was the only sincere remark he made. What did it matter if it rained, if the people suffered . . . ?

At four o'clock in the afternoon, a melancholy drumming mingling with a boy's shrill voice summoned the inmates of the women's prison to hear an important announcement. Even *La Moresina*, trembling and shivering with fever, had to attend.

'Don't let her go,' I said to her mother. 'It is dangerous for her.'

The old woman smiled mournfully.

'She won't die and even if she did . . .' She closed her mouth and seemed to make a great effort to swallow some bitter words. 'Even if she has to die,' she went on, 'it is better that one should die than that the whole family should lose their lives.'

This nervous, thin old woman, with bright, intelligent eyes, tottering along on feet the size of those of a small child, was the classic type

of Chinese woman. She was shrewd and knew her business—up to all the Communist tricks and often anticipating what they were going to do. Her clear-sightedness and remarkable ability to base her reasoning on the happenings of every day were united to an enchanting lisp. Coming out into the courtyard she said jokingly, to hearten *La More-sina*:

'You are ill, I am old, the girls are quite small, but see what honour they pay us. . . . The *Fu Nü Hui*<sup>1</sup> wants us at all costs. Courage!'

When they got back, I asked the grandmother the reason for this meeting.

'They explained to us for the thousandth time the tenets of the *Fu Nü Hui*.' And she shook her head.



The *Fu Nü Hui* is a part of the Communist activity that costs both sweat and immense efforts—and for many reasons. Classical Chinese literature expresses the conception of the married woman by two characters—*Nei-jen*, i.e. 'the person inside,' meaning that the right setting for a woman is the family and the home. The custom of binding the feet, which dominated the sex for so many centuries, was based on this conception. Apart from ordinary meetings with friends, relatives and neighbours, the woman must never appear in public. She must not take an interest in social life. Her kingdom is the family, of which she is queen. A visitor arriving at the door of the private courtyard will ask permission before going in. 'Yu jen mei-yu?'—'Are there people or not?'<sup>2</sup> If a voice answers, 'Yu,' it means that there are men in the house, and the visitor can enter; if the answer is 'Mei-yu,' it means that there are only women, and he must go away.

This is the ancient Chinese custom—that is, among people living far from the large cities, where western civilization has destroyed or modified so many traditions that were not always or all to be condemned.

Communism sees an obstacle in traditionalism and a danger to its own expansion, and therefore denounces it *en bloc* and stimulates feminine vanity by insisting on the need for rehabilitation:

'Women must escape from the slavery in which they are kept. . . . They must enjoy liberty. . . . Women will be better mothers of families if they are free citizens.'

<sup>1</sup> The women's organization.

<sup>2</sup> Literally, 'Have people (or) not have?'

Women, despite their common sense, lack the necessary education to grasp the real meaning of these words, and still less do they appreciate the inevitable consequences of Communism. So they only ask for explanations:

'What does it mean, to be a free citizen? Who wants to put me in prison?'

The Communists come to their help and try to make the meaning clear. The People's Commissar calls a meeting of the women.

'We know,' he tells them, 'that you cannot understand what we are saying to you. It is a very large question and you cannot see it in its true light. We will try to open your minds, to train you to enjoy what you have never enjoyed.'

The strangeness of such words excites wonder, curiosity and perhaps enthusiasm.

'Nobody has ever talked to us like this.'

The Communists profit and, with that veneer of friendship that deceives even the most careful observer, launch the idea of a woman's organization to which all must belong, the better to study the problems affecting their sex.

'But we haven't the time! We are too busy—and besides, we don't understand anything.'

The shrewd *Kung-tso-yuan* knows that these words mean something else, and it is not difficult for him to find the right answer.

'Don't be afraid—we'll see to your husbands.'

The words are a shock because they make the invasion of family life much too clear. In the minds of the older women there arises the memory of what they have heard or perhaps seen. Their reactions are simple and decisive:

'He is a Communist like the others. The others are bad, therefore he can't be good. "We'll see to your husbands." What does he propose to do?'

The younger women take it light-heartedly, laughing at the Communists in their happy ignorance of what the future holds, and building up a delightful dream in which they will find a cheap and pleasant way of amusing themselves. This gaiety reaches its climax when the posts in the new organization are distributed.

Of the two factions at the meeting, the older women refuse to collaborate, while the younger element, as a result of flattery or perhaps curiosity, end by giving in. The *Kung-tso-yuan* is delighted.

'Old brains cannot understand the greatness of Communism,' he

says with a scornful smile, ‘but we shall know how to deal with even the most stubborn.’

The *Fu Nü Hui* will be created, and all must belong: adults and children, married and unmarried.

The meeting ends and the good news is announced with exaggerated praise of the women, ‘who have realized their noble position and reconquered what has been denied to them for so long.’ The men are ordered to set the women free for their work of rehabilitation.

In this first lesson, the greatest energy is devoted to presenting in the darkest colours the sad condition of women, both in the past and in the present, particular emphasis being laid on ‘the barbarous custom of relegating her to the home and suffocating her instinct for liberty.’

There comes the second lesson: ‘Whoever has a brain to think with and two arms to work with must enjoy the same rights as all others. Instead, you work without pay and may think only what others compel you to think.’

Even if uneducated, the Chinese woman is not lacking in shrewdness, sincerity and—one might add—selfishness, which makes her say:

‘We are quite ready to listen to you. What will you give us as a reward?’

The general amusement that greets this remark is stifled by promises of help.

‘Ask what you want.’

That day the women get all they require. Then the trouble begins. The help turns into fetters, and the women feel themselves bound to show their gratitude for Communist generosity. Without understanding what it involves, they give their willing consent to do something in return. The Commissar does not ask very much—only for some trustworthy person who will report to him all that she hears the other women say about the organization, and all that the men say about Communism. The unfortunate dupe, not able to refuse, goes into courtyards, asks questions and gathers as much information as possible. At first the other women, not knowing what is going on, and not realizing that a dangerous spy is among them, talk freely.

Again, if the majority of the women in a village have accepted help, they band together to form what is virtually a secret society. In the evening, when everyone is at home, they creep into the courtyards and crouch under the windows in order to listen to what is being said, their vile behaviour made easier by the fact that in China

all the houses have only one floor, the windows being very low and filled with paper, so that those inside cannot see what is happening in the courtyard. During this period of spying there are very few meetings, the *Kung-tso-yuan* appears extremely friendly and his lessons are not so abstruse and aggressive as formerly. It is no more than a short pause while the reports of the spies are collated, and notes made of those accused of criticism of Communism.

Meanwhile the men are suffering the most terrible anxiety; they have seen what has happened with regard to the children, to the division of the land, to the organization of the peasants.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps they have already taken part in meetings that have left little belief in the much-vaunted kindness of the Communists. Some optimists may try to encourage the faint-hearted.

'Nobody has ever paid any attention to women. The Communists will find out that they are no use. Anyhow, women have long tongues and they will know how to look after themselves.'

After a few days the *Kung-tso-yuan* is thoroughly conversant with the state of mind of the village, and almost all the families are more or less on the black list. The peaceful interlude comes to an end and the drum sounds once more through the streets of the village. All the women go to the threshing-floor.

'You,' says the *Kung-tso-yuan*, fixing his eyes on some poor old woman. 'Where were you five days ago at three o'clock in the afternoon?'

'At home.'

'What were you doing?'

'Spinning.'

'Who was with you in your courtyard? . . . You really forget! I will tell you. There were three other women.' He glances round the crowd. 'May we know what you were talking about?'

Her cunning tormentor laughs and she does not in the least understand what is going on.

'Here,' he says to the assembly, 'is one of the three ladies who were with her. She will help her to recall what she has forgotten.'

And one by one the hostile witnesses are called up. Then begins a disgraceful comedy of insults, accusations, threats. The other women are astonished and frightened, but then their expressions change, their eyes blaze, they tremble with rage and the storm bursts. Abuse and curses rain on the head of the *Kung-tso-yuan*.

<sup>1</sup> The Peasants' Association is dealt with in a later chapter.

'Son of a ——, take care in future not to ill-treat someone who does not want to sing the praises of Communism!'

He listens impassively, then, as many turn their backs on him and begin to go away:

'Stop!' he shouts. 'You've had your say. Now I'm going to have mine.'

But they pay no attention. Poor creatures, they do not know that there will be someone in the future who will compel them to listen. Those who remain protest, shriek, curse. One of them throws a sock at the *Kung-tso-yuan*—a deadly insult in China. He sees that the situation has become serious. More than half the women have already left, and no argument can calm those who remain, no word of his stem the invectives of one faction or the counter-abuse of the other.

'Go away!' he shouts. 'We shall soon meet again.'

The women disperse, leaving him alone with the fear of what will happen to him when he has to report on his work to his superiors. His over-zealousness has prevented a victory that would have produced far-reaching results. It is a serious blow, and no argument, not even that of having blindly obeyed orders, can save him.

For the heads of the Party, it has been an experiment. They started the machine and drove it full steam ahead in a certain direction. If it had persisted they would have let it go on until it was completely worn out. Instead it had broken down. No matter—there is always a remedy. All that is needed is to replace the Commissar and change the tactics. When more meetings are held, such words as 'Communism' and 'rehabilitation' will not be mentioned.

Meanwhile the women have gone back to their ordinary lives, proud of their victory. The new commissar, who appears to know nothing of what has happened, is a most agreeable man, and soon the people's hostility dies away. Even the women who carried out the honourable work of spying are forgotten.

Fresh tactics: 'Win the sympathy of the people.'

'Do you know,' says the new Commissar, 'I've just seen the mandarin's wife, a beautiful woman. It's a pity she makes such an effort to conform to the new order, for she is always forgetting what she ought to do.'

With pleasant words and a brilliant gift for mimicry, he makes fun of the mandarin's wife. The Chinese people love these unexpected impersonations. They listen, laugh and forget everything. The new teacher is an artist and a brilliant jester.

Naturally his repertoire includes not only the mandarin's wife, but also the other leading lights. Gradually he descends to the people themselves; he imitates feminine weaknesses and various traditional habits. But he never forgets that he is a Communist and never loses sight of the ultimate object of his play-acting. Between one witticism and another, it is easy for him to insert here and there a word, a sentence, a comparison between the former way of life and the present state of things; to explain what he would do to make the world pleasant for women; and to make it more peaceful.

'Do you think it possible for a baby to wear the same clothes till he is old? One day or other he has got to change them.'

The results he obtains are startling, some even doubting if he is a Communist. 'Certainly things have got to change,' is the idea he insinuates into people's minds. The most intelligent perhaps understand his plans, and compare the ideas he is inculcating with what has happened in other places, not only in their own village, but also in other villages that have been 'liberated,' but they see that life cannot go on in the old ways. Changes are necessary, but what changes? If all Communists were like him, one might perhaps try. Unfortunately, however . . . and their minds wander into a labyrinth of doubts and suspicions. The less intelligent of the women, dazzled by the jokes of the Commissar and thinking him 'fashionable,' take up his catch-words and go about repeating, 'Of course things have got to change.' And while at the beginning they were perhaps the fiercest opponents of Communist penetration, they now become its ardent supporters.

The laughing *Kung-tso-yuam* keeps his eye on them, keeps in touch with them, and creates a desire to know more about this new system. In this way he manages to organize a separate school of enthusiasts who are convinced of the need for change. They ask insistently what this new world will be like. He does not give anything away; he wants first of all to strengthen the faith of his admirers, and stimulates their curiosity until it becomes almost unbearable. Finally one day he asks:

'How can one instil new life into society if there are people who put obstacles in our way?'

Let us suppose that the group to which he is speaking consists entirely of women. Their answer, particularly from the younger ones, is almost certain to be:

'We will see that they don't put obstacles in our way.'

'Good, and how shall we discover such women?' He gives them no

time to think, but goes on: 'It's quite simple—and we can succeed if you will help—for example, by....'

And the spies begin their work again. The instruction as to how to find out who are opposing Communism is based on the material collected in the first instance. Naturally it is hard work and needs cunning and patience. It is necessary to train the women to ignore all dictates of conscience and to be ready to obey every order. Meanwhile the amusing meetings go on, but no time must be lost. The public is now ready and the converts to the Communist creed can try a little experiment.

Their enthusiasm acts like a wave of the sea breaking over individuals and families, stinging and irritating wherever it can find a scratch or a sore or a bite. The people are confronted by a curious development. They notice an unusual ferment, and inexplicable agitation, excited chatter; and while at first the talk of the converted women does not go beyond the repetition of the amusing things they have seen, soon they begin to discuss, to criticize, to praise or condemn Communism, as if they were talking about something that emerged here or there from some mysterious cave. There is the greatest confusion, and the opposing views create a strange, painful bewilderment, until in the middle of this conflict the drum calls the women to a meeting.

On the stage are the heads of the organization and a representative of the young recruits. She addresses one of the women:

'Step forward, you. If I were to come to your house and abuse your children and your husband, would you be pleased?'

'No.'

'If I tried to interfere with your work, would you be pleased?'

'No.'

'Why do you want to prevent other people from thinking as they like? Why do you abuse Communism? What have you got in your head? Speak!'

The other recruits, distributed among the crowd, support her.

'You must have some sense beaten into that old head of yours. Speak, you witch. . . .'

The tragic reappearance of a state of affairs that all thought was over and done with rouses the former spirit of the women. A horrible scene follows, with disgusting curses, recriminations, insults. The Commissar intervenes, there are more yells of abuse, and he is called upon to use his authority. A certain quiet is established and the laughing Commissar

takes the stage. His words pass like an icy wind across the still-excited faces. The comedy is finished; the curtain is rising on the tragedy.

'The meeting must go on! Woe to those who try to stop it!'

He makes a gesture to the soldiers, who close in on the women. All freedom disappears and protests die away in a confused muttering of hate and misery. An abyss opens between the women and the victim.

'Speak, witch!' the new recruits begin to shout again.

The woman cowers, bows her head, crosses her legs and sits down, shutting herself up in the silence of the tomb. Beatings, torture, cutting in pieces—nothing will now make her speak. That is a characteristic of the Chinese woman. When she is offended, or if in a quarrel she cannot give vent to her anger, she adopts this form of silent protest. She lives tortured by her hatred, she does not eat, she does not speak and in a few days she dies. Apart from the tragedy of this attitude, the woman who falls a victim to the Communists becomes dumb and excites the greatest resentment; one can imagine, therefore, the sort of cruelties used to put an end to her resistance, but without success.

We will assume that, as with the first, this second experiment ends in failure, though the Communists go about boasting that they had discovered and destroyed the obstacle to the progress of the new order. No woman dares to speak of what she sees and what she feels. The *Kung-tso-yuan* discards his cap and bells, and appears in his true character as a policeman. All try to avoid the women who are under suspicion and go to the meetings with heavy hearts, blindly obeying any order so that they may at least save their own lives and those of their families.

Among the many strange, beautiful and ugly things that one sees in China, there is one that makes a deep impression on the newly arrived missionary: the so-called *shuo li*—'stating the case.'

When a quarrel arises in a family or between neighbours, the interested parties are not content to keep silence about it, or to settle the matter among themselves. Very often all concerned, and especially the women, wish to publish it to the world. At the climax of the quarrel the women become furious, lose all self-control and rush out of the house shouting:

'We are going into the street to *shuo li*!'

Dishevelled and with wild gestures, shrieking to make themselves heard, they tell the whole story. The entire village turns out as if they were going to see a play. No one is astonished, and no one intervenes,

even if the two sides begin to tear out each other's hair—it is too dangerous. The people regard the whole affair as quite natural.

On these occasions the most intimate secrets, the most carefully concealed stories are shouted to the four winds. It makes them happy to scream till they are exhausted and voiceless. Usually it is an important person, 'one with great face,' i.e. very influential and much respected, who by repeating vehemently, 'Certainly, you are right—it is just as you say,' succeeds in putting a stop to the fray. The contestants retire, content at having 'saved face,' but still filled with fury and a desire for revenge. It is strange that, even considering its setting, the matter does not end in a bilious attack; instead it has disastrous consequences for families and individuals.

The Communists have found for this weakness a use that is both wicked and horrible, for it serves them as a means of disintegration based on the ignorance of the people and especially that of the women. Starting from the principle that 'everything that opposes us must be destroyed, everything that helps us must be inculcated and favoured,' the custom as old as China of rushing into the street to *shuo li* is not only ardently supported, but also vastly improved. It does not matter that this is an old custom; the important thing is to furbish it up and make it as good as new. 'The power to show that they are right is the right of all.' But it must be understood what 'stating the case' really means. Let us see how it develops.

Communism must make a clean sweep not only in the material field by destroying and plundering, but also in the moral field. This is obvious: it is the heart of the matter, for it means life or death to the Party. 'We,' they say explicitly, 'shall never succeed unless we empty people's minds—or rather, open and empty them. If this great task is not achieved, all the rest will be useless.'

When, then, there is a quarrel with its attendant *shuo li*, the first to appear on the scene are the *Kung-tso-yuan* and his young recruits. They listen carefully, make a note of what is said and if necessary, fan the flames. When the tragic-comedy is over, the paladins of the new order take the stage.

'You have shouted, but you haven't settled anything. The matter must be decided by a judge. The people will be the judge.'

That means a People's Court. The two families must appear. From the babel and confusion that arise, only one thing is clear—the hatred of the two parties. In order to reach a settlement, the Court very often divides into two contending factions—the men on one side, the women

on the other—which serves to increase the pandemonium. Sometimes the women say that family X is in the right and family Y is in the wrong, while the men take the opposite view. Add to this the incompetence of the *Kung-tso-yuan* (I am not speaking of the ignorant young recruits) and the bewilderment of the people, and the outcome can be imagined. ‘The winner shall punish the loser.’ So the two families tear each other to pieces on the stage. And still more horrible is the thought of the brutal torture inflicted as punishments. Such tragic cases have occurred between families blinded by inveterate hatred dating back perhaps for two or three generations. It does not seem true to them that they are able to give vent to their passionate desire to carry out the sacred will of their ancestors. This is their fate and they are happy, even if it costs them their lives.

To keep the longing for *shuo li* awake, the recruits maintain emotions at fever-pitch; they go from home to home encouraging women in their feuds, promising compensation for any losses, assuring them support, and often forcing them to *shuo li*. In ninety per cent of the meetings, the discussions are devoted to this question.

Things reach such a pass that the Communists themselves take a hand and there begins a period of fear and blood—the period of the so-called ‘hunt for traitors.’ The women are the first target—and for a very simple reason: a woman by her determined silence admits the accusation; if she speaks, it is very easy to make her contradict herself. In either event, she will be tortured.

Such crimes are the outcome of the principle already mentioned: ‘Empty the minds in order to triumph.’ To empty them by reasoning is a dangerous process. It is necessary to astonish, to impress, to terrorize; a person who is a prey to terror can be forced to do anything.

The women under Communist domination must behave with a complete lack of the modesty inculcated by tradition. They must take water to soldiers, attend to the wounded, make slippers for the army, etc.—things that nothing formerly could have persuaded them to do. Many struggle against such things, but others become meek and obedient lambs. Time and habit complete the work.

The ground having been prepared, regulations are drawn up for the *Fu Nü Hui*. These regulations emanate from the *Kung-tso-yuan*, who acts as he likes. It often happens that he is also the master of the village school and so he sets the example to the young girls who attend the school, or teaches them to overcome their natural modesty and appear on the public stage. When one thinks of the strictness of the Chinese

tradition that absolutely forbids a woman to appear in a play, this shows the depths of immorality that Communism has reached. One of the chief tasks of the young recruits is to choose the girls and brides of once rich and respected families, and compel them, after training by a special teacher, to enact the immoral lives of their families before the coming of Communism. All this is done 'to educate the people—to teach them to despise the rich.' The people's comment is, 'Who are richer than the Communist leaders?'

The women's organization, like all the others, is ruled by the principle, 'The sentence is death,' and so the regulations drawn up with such solemnity are of secondary importance. The law depends on the whim of the chief, which explains the amazing differences in the way in which the organizations function in the villages in the same zone. The only exception is during an emergency—the sudden passage of soldiers, the need to prepare by a certain date a given number of slippers for the army, etc.—in which event all the women are mobilized.

Under these conditions it is easy to imagine the confusion and the nervousness when the drum beats in the village streets. The sound forces its way into the courtyards and homes like a bird of prey. All are still: they seem afraid to move, they pass their hands over their faces and their hair, they arrange their clothes as if some unknown and terrible visitor had detected them in some evil-doing. 'A meeting. What will happen?' One hears those words passing from mouth to mouth like some fatal threat. The women seem, as it were, to be sucked down by some retreating wave, but this does not enable them to foresee what will happen in the depths in which they will find themselves. The Communist technique is at work. 'Take them by surprise.' It is brutal and remorseless, for it deprives the women of any possibility of reflection on the peril that threatens. What a contrast there is between the unhappy listlessness of the women who come out in groups and make their way, silent and anxious, towards the scene of wickedness, and the journalistic propaganda that proclaims 'The enthusiasm of the free women. . . . The fervour of a better understanding of their rights and duties. . . . The surprising ease with which they solve the most difficult problems. . . . The sometimes almost ingenuous joy of the female sex in having at last won their liberty.'

No period in the stormy history of China has been so stained with falsity and lies as the present.

*15th September*

At last there was a little sun, and some people profited by it. The head of the chamber of commerce sent for me. What it is to have confidence in a person who it is believed can raise the dead! There were more people than usual in the chamber of commerce. Young men and women were making pullovers.

'The Communists are never idle,' was their greeting.

'Really?' I replied, 'They say that idleness is the father of all vices.'

They asked me if I was able to knit. Some of the girls, more precocious than the others, began plying me with stupid questions. The discussion turned on matters that should not be mentioned, and they laughed at our celibacy. I let them talk and then intervened at a suitable moment.

'I have been in China for some years and I know the Chinese people a little. Tell me, if one of you men did something stupid with a woman,' (they were all as surprised as if I had touched each one of them), 'how long do you think it could be concealed?'

They were all silent.

'Well, there are three of us missionaries here; Father Perottoni has been at Suiyeh for twelve years, I have been there for seven, and Father Monti has only just arrived. I defy any of you to tell me . . .'

Most of them looked down. I got up, said good-bye, and went home.

We took advantage of the fine weather to hang out our blankets and rugs. How disgusting they looked! There was blood everywhere; certainly those insects had never found such tasty morsels. After dinner, there was another tremendous thunderstorm. In the evening it was fine again.

I left the prison and went into the open country—an enchanting sight. The whole valley had turned crimson, and Monsignor Scarella's tomb and the ruined seminary shone with a mysterious brilliance. The mountains to the west were veiled in a layer of incandescent cloud; lower down I could distinguish the peaks, the ravines, the great lines of rocks washed by water and polished by hail.

I turned back, almost sorrowful. How strange it was! I was a prisoner—and a prisoner of the Communists. Was it, perhaps, a dishonour? One played with death while waiting for liberty.

Evening fell, and that divine enchantment gradually faded, inexorably swallowed up by the approaching darkness.

16th September

Another night of rain and vicissitudes. Once again a visit to the head of the chamber of commerce. I went by way of Hochien, where a People's Court was being held. I thought of the unfortunate victims, and, without wanting to do so, stopped to hear what was being said. They were punishing *Lao-T'ien-Yeh*, 'the Old Grandfather in the Sky.' Before an image made expressly for the purpose, a People's Commissar was holding forth:

'You who are in the celestial region with round hands on your fat belly killing lice, why do you go on sending rain?'

With a sudden movement, he changed his tone. He became serious and with burlesque humility knelt to pray to *Lao-T'ien-Yeh*.

'Don't you really want to listen to us? Have you forgotten us?'

He continued in this singsong, blasphemous style. Finally, he stopped and turning to the people who were pale and overcome with religious fear at so much profanity, said to them:

'You see that? *Lao-T'ien-Yeh* has forgotten you. Will you go on praying to him? It is time to have done with this folly!'

So saying, he gave a kick to the image, and struck it, cursing it amid the shouts and coarse laughter of his supporters, jeering at those who believed in God.

'We are the masters, we are God! I promise you that after to-day there will be no more rain and you can cut the millet.'

I went away wondering why God had not struck that blasphemer with lightning. The Communists make use of every device to instil the poison of atheism into the people. As a comment on his sermon, it poured in torrents after dinner.

18th September

A day of malaria. I refused all food. Even *La Moresina*, poor thing, sent her elder daughter to ask me to go and see her. I regretted so much that I could not help her. After dinner my temperature went down and I tried to get up, but my head was swimming and I was so weak that I had to go back to bed.

The judge came and complained that the servant had not returned. . . . The hospital . . . etc. . . . I was so sick of it that I did not trouble to hide my disgust. Father Perottoni intervened and said to the judge.

'You see he does not know what he is saying. Wait till to-morrow to talk to him.'

The judge laughed and went away.

They hated us with all their hearts, and their pride was so overweening that they despised us and thought we were idiots. They dangled liberty before our eyes merely to make us realize the beauty of their chains. I knew that if I were to say one little word, I should become a king among them. I also knew that they were waiting for that word from me and were working with that in view, but I would never have said it. I heard more than one of the leading Communists remark:

'If only we could convert him, how useful he would be to us!'

They hated us, but they could never deny our superiority.

*19th September*

At last the servant got back, accompanied by a Christian called Ma Shan, and bringing a great many letters, but no medicine. We sent the servant to the judge to apologize for having returned empty-handed because of the critical position at Wuan. There was good news of the missionaries.

The Christian, Ma Shan, told us a horrifying story. A few days ago a little party of Nationalist soldiers marched from the town of Changte towards Suiyeh. The people rose almost *en masse* and in eighteen districts bound the People's Commissars and threw them into wells. The soldiers marched beyond Suiyeh, stayed for a few days, and then returned to Changte; the people in the eighteen districts saw that they were lost and almost all fled to Changte, the old people who stayed behind paying the penalty for all the others.

Our servant had a very bad reception from the judge and came to complain to us. His way of speaking, his face and the look in his eyes showed how terrified he was. We asked his forgiveness.

*20th September*

That morning I visited the poor *Moresina*, who, it was plain to see, was suffering from typhus. I did everything material and spiritual that I could for her, forbidding her elder daughter, He-lou, to go near her too often. After a little while a relative of the sick woman arrived. She, too, had to give her advice:

'It is a current of hot gas that does not go either up or down. If we could succeed in removing it, her life would be saved.'

She got to work at once, going into the courtyard to collect some ashes, placing them into a saucepan, adding water, and then putting them on to boil. I watched her with astonishment, and when she

advanced on the sick woman to make her drink this concoction, stopped her, and asked for an explanation. She said:

'This gaseous current of which I spoke is located in her stomach. It is necessary for her to drink this, for the cinders can put out the fire and disperse the gas.'

I protested and explained the danger. The grandmother and the girls, who were watching, agreed that this strange medicine should be thrown away. The news spread through the village, and the life of this woman was in my hands. If she had died, it would have been my fault.

*21st September*

I tasted on this day the bitterness of death.

As usual, I was called to visit a patient and started off accompanied by two soldiers, who took me to the mandarin's. There were very few people about and my reception was as cold as ever. They made me wait in the courtyard for an hour, till finally the two soldiers came out.

'Follow us,' they said.

We went through the village, reached the last house and crossed some fields. Then under some trees I saw four more soldiers. When I reached them, a brutal voice said:

'Take this pick and dig a hole large enough for a recumbent body.'

'But . . .'

'Don't you understand?'

Only too well. A cold sweat; a tingling that passed all through me, seeming to destroy the very framework of my being; a dimming of the vision; a desperate beating of the heart. . . . I was incapable of movement, on the point of collapse. . . . Then I must have lost consciousness from the rush of blood to my head.

When I came to myself, I was digging, the pick as heavy as lead, and my feet were already deep in the wet cold earth. A suffocating sob, a cry:

'Mother, help me!' And I wept.

What more could I do? I commended my poor soul to God and dug my grave. If this crime was necessary for the good of this noble and unfortunate Chinese people, whom I loved even if they were responsible for my death, so be it.

The hole was deep and I was already dead. I lost awareness of the world around me. Then a heavy hand seized me by the throat.

'That's enough. Come out and send your Christian at once to get the medicines.'

This sudden reprieve struck me like a blow. I should have preferred to go on digging and to let them bury me in that earth. I came out of the grave and, wiping the cold sweat from my forehead, returned with heavy steps to my prison. Should I speak, should I tell my comrades what had happened to me? I decided to say nothing.

‘Are you feeling ill?’ asked Father Monti when I got back to the courtyard.

‘Yes, perhaps it is the usual malaria. I’m going to bed.’

I went to bed and cried all night.

One does not joke with Communists; either one obeys their vile orders, or torture and death are one’s portion.

## CHAPTER

# 8

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*22nd September 1945*

My soul seemed to be washed by those tears. They saved me. I got up wondering at the change in myself. Yesterday's joke had not left me with any particular feeling of fear. It was a terrible lesson and we three agreed to send the servant to get the medicines.

Accompanied by the judge's secretary, I went to see where the new hospital was to be, visiting the head of the chamber of commerce on the way. I found there a dirty, sullen-faced man with a scar. He looked at me without saying a word, but watched everything I did, giving me a strange feeling of alarm. Finally, he asked me in English, speaking with a curious hesitation, what my nationality was and how long I had been in China. I asked him who he was and what post he held and, although I spoke in Chinese, he did not answer.

A girl explained cheerfully: 'He is the Minister for the Theatre.'

Was this the man whom I have heard spoken of with such horror? His crimes were many and terrible. Two tasks were entrusted to him: to destroy all sense of right and wrong, especially in the young, with the most immoral plays; and to use every means to persuade all decent people to believe in Communism. Were we also destined to fall into his wicked hands?

I left at once with the judge's secretary to see the new hospital. It was a fine house with an enormous courtyard.

'What is this?' I asked myself. 'A market?'

Everyone stared at me and someone asked:

'Why has that European devil come here?'

The judge, who was in the middle of the courtyard, noticed us and we went up to him. The secretary was about to speak when the judge made a face at him, forcing him to remain silent, then, with a sudden oath, shouted: 'Get out of here!' As we reached the door, I heard him say:

'What has happened? Haven't they buried him alive?'

Those words made me feel that I had a knife at my throat, but the moment had not yet come.

We returned, worried and thoughtful. During the walk the secretary and I exchanged only a few words. Poor fellow, before the arrival of the Communists he had been regarded as the best calligraphist in the district, belonging to a much-respected family, which, like all those in a similar position, had received a death blow with the arrival of the Communists. His relatives had been on very friendly terms with our missionaries, which now caused him the greatest anxiety. He begged me not to mention our 'ignominious' experience to anyone. The way in which he had lost face that morning was terribly dangerous, and it was not the first time it had happened. Being both shy and timid, he did not think even vaguely of escaping, but accepted his bad fortune.

*23rd September*

All the men and boys had been called up to help with the harvest. Two 'volunteers' had to be chosen for the army. After a long speech, the Commissar said:

'Well now, who wants to be a soldier?'

Complete silence.

The Commissar became angry; he threatened, and made another speech, but nobody wished to go and be killed.

The head of the village managed to come to an arrangement with two families and brought two young men. Naturally this was done with the greatest secrecy; it would have been a disaster if the Commissar had discovered anything—it would have meant torture and death. This was what had happened in a nearby village, where, after a meeting which went on uninterruptedly for several days, the head of the village had paid two young men very liberally to agree to become soldiers. The Commissar had found out this 'undignified chaffering' and the poor man lost his life.

In another neighbouring village, a similar meeting was held, which everyone had to attend. It lasted for a day and a night, then another day and night. Woe to anyone who dared to leave! The third day came and the exasperation of the people reached a climax, the commissar uttering terrible threats. Finally, towards evening, the poor people, unable to stand any more, so fervently entreated two young men that they were obliged to come forward.

'Our soldiers are volunteers,' the Communists proclaim with bare-faced impudence.

Here is the much-vaunted liberty. Let the poor people try to oppose the slightest order or wish of the chiefs. . . . It means the halter or the grave—or, what is worse, unspeakable tortures.

The two soldiers chosen that morning were carried round in triumph, everyone shouting for joy.

*24th September*

More verbal battles. I was giving the head of the chamber of commerce an injection, when a badly dressed young man came in. He wore spectacles and, wishing to pose as being extremely learned, greeted me in English. At the back of the room some girls were sitting intent on the very feminine task of copying a fashion-plate in an American weekly. The young man went over to them, took up the paper and began to translate with a very superior air, but after three words he broke down. *Pons asinorum!* He sat down and began to talk to me.

'As you are aware, none of us suffer from syphilis. It is not a disease of ours, but was brought by you foreigners. We Communists suffer only from stomach troubles and malaria.'

I asked him if he had studied medicine, and how long ago the foreigners had brought this disease to China.

'Not more than a hundred years ago.'

'Then,' I replied, 'how is it that in a famous medical book, written at least three hundred years ago by a Chinese author in his own language, we read of syphilis being so wide-spread that the author found it necessary to prescribe the remedies? And even if there have been Europeans, China is an immense country and they preferred the great seaports, not daring to come into the interior. So how has syphilis killed so many of even those who lived in the mountains?'

They all laughed. The sneering youth, lost for words, swallowed a bowl of noodles and left.

Communists do not have syphilis! He himself was suffering from it very badly, and I was treating two of the girls present for it. They talk like that because their chiefs order them to.

*25th September*

The weather improved, but a cold breeze sprang up. Summer was over and the leaves were beginning to turn yellow. The judge came

during the morning and talked of nothing but the hospital. He said to me:

'During the meetings we have had these last days, everything down to the last detail has been settled. It will be called the Union Hospital. All the staff will be Communists.'

His words tumbled out like those of a child trying to speak between sobs.

'You will only have to do your job.'

It was a warning to me. If I did otherwise, I would go to my grave. That day I wrote:

'If I have to go to the hospital, where will the other two go? Must I accept in this way without making any conditions? Could I insist that the domestic staff should be Christians, to be freely chosen by me? These and other more or less serious problems give me a great deal to think about. But what is the good of thinking? The alternatives are clear: if we agree, we are kings; if we refuse to collaborate in any way, then what will happen will happen. My view is that we should refuse, but I am not alone.'

'We decided to do as best we could, making promises to please them and, when we had to make a final decision, state our terms.'

The grandmother came and called me because *La Moresina* was very ill. The crisis had arrived. I ordered cold water to be put on her head and face, and made her take two aspirins. Her heart seemed strong, so there was hope. The girls were crying. He-lou, the elder one, never left her mother and I tried to get her away.

'No,' she sobbed, 'I want to die with her.'

*26th September*

I again visited the head of the chamber of commerce. He was getting well and wanted to talk. His original serpent-like hostility had changed to kindness and affection. Without knowing it, we had almost become friends. This man, who had seemed to want to eat me alive when I had first attended him, struck me as more to be pitied than condemned. Some fugitive sentences showed his weariness of his evil life. That day he talked a great deal about his home at Paoting, near Peking; about his family; about his years at the Catholic University in Peking. He showed me a book that only those in the highest rank of the Party were allowed to read. I looked at the table of contents. It seemed to be a terrible and most interesting book. When I asked if I could read it, he answered:

'As there is nobody here, I can speak frankly. If anyone discovered that I had shown it to you, not only I but you and your companions would not live for more than a minute.'

'I will keep the secret,' I replied. 'Lend it to me.'

'No, no! For the sake of your life and my own, do not ask me.'

He hid it and would not tell me anything more about it.

I asked him if he really believed in the Communist creed.

'Yes,' he said, 'it is the best theory and the best legal system of all. I am sorry that my people still do not understand it, which obliges us to use severe measures.'

I enquired if there were any Russians among the Chinese Communists.

'Yes, there are some, and there are several thousand Chinese students in the different universities in Russia. In a few years they will come back to be officers in the army, doctors, lawyers, and so on.'

I asked him about the top rank in the Party. He said:

'It is very difficult to get into that. You have to undergo dreadful tests.'

'For example?'

'A few days ago, a man was given as a final test the order to kill his whole family. He slaughtered his wife, his parents, and his children.'

'But these are the crimes of devils! You are destroyers of the human race!'

He laughed and went on:

'Tell me: when you became a priest, what was asked of you? You were forbidden to marry. When you came to China, you had to leave your relatives, you had to give up everything that might interfere with your work.'

'But I left my country of my own free will, and however far away, I still love my relatives. Besides, I could have returned to my country had I wished.'

'If you are telling the truth, you cannot be a good advocate for your faith. Your heart would still be swayed by affection, which prevents a complete dedication to your ideal. When a man is absolutely devoted to an ideal, he forgets everything and despises all danger.'

'But what you say is horrible and impossible. Man has needs and duties that he cannot ignore without staining himself with crime.'

'We have achieved what seems to you impossible, and we continue our march towards total victory. Your religion demands certain sacrifices of you, and in order to respect its laws, you submit more or

less willingly. Our law does not demand any sacrifices. They are unnecessary. The individual who succeeds in understanding the whole of the Communist ideology is beyond sacrifices and fears nothing.'

'If what you say is true, you are creating a being contrary to nature.'

'Man is matter that can take all imprints. Our initial work is to destroy all affection or feeling, as you said a little while ago. They are the result of a mistaken education. Man must reach a position in which he has absolute control of everything around him. There must no longer be any distinction between good and evil. You say that there is a God. We say that God does not exist. We say it and believe it. To admit the existence of God is to impose a burden upon man that compels him to bear the weight of a multiplicity of rules, laws, and duties that deprive him of his liberty and make him a prisoner. But these rules, laws, and duties are contrary to nature and contrary to the conception of a God, as I will prove to you. You believe that there is a God and accept His laws, but you do not succeed in keeping them. At intervals, you have to confess your sins, which shows that there is a burden that human nature cannot bear. And everything that is contrary to nature is false. You are still miserable slaves.'

'On what do you base this theory of yours?'

'On the noble origin of man.'

'And what is that origin?'

'Nature.'

'So man is a product of nature?'

'Yes.'

'And you succeed in moulding this product as you wish?'

'As you see.'

'Then why do you not succeed in moulding the rest of nature?'

'We attack our problems one after another. When we have overcome the greatest and most important difficulties—those affecting man—it will be our duty to solve the problems in other fields.'

'You have studied chemistry?'

'Yes.'

'You have found that in nature there are laws that matter must obey?'

'Yes.'

'Well, what do you think of those laws?'

'I think they are inexplicable demons.'

'Therefore it is difficult, even impossible, for these laws to be moulded as you suggest?'

'It is difficult.'

'And how do these laws originate?'

'They are innate in nature itself.'

'You tell me that man is a product of nature. Therefore he must be subject, as all is, to the laws of nature. And you say that these laws cannot be altered.'

He interrupted by asking me with a kindly smile to have a cup of tea.

'There are many problems,' he continued, 'and they are of many kinds. It is our duty to solve them, and solve them we shall, because man is so powerful.'

'I wish you only one thing: that first of all you will find yourselves confronted by the discouraging failure to solve these problems by means of your theories, so will conserve your energies for more practical questions and consequently lose less time.'

'We two represent two power systems and time will prove which is right.'

'What? Why talk of time? Must not that too be moulded? Is it not a part of nature?'

He laughed gaily and went on to discuss other things. I asked him if he was not one of the heads of the Party. He was sorry, he could not tell me. Poor misguided man! Before our argument began, he talked with such longing of his family, his friends, of the good days at the University, and showed his dislike of this wandering, aimless life. And the more brightly truth shines before their eyes, so much the more is it obscured by the curse of absurd principles founded on materialism and the denial of all that is noble in man.

In thinking over the discussion, which lasted for more than two hours, I felt as if I had been staring at an immense ruin. Everything serves the purposes of Communism, because this is the outcome of their principles. Every error or heresy has something of truth in it, and, with diabolical cunning, the Communists know how to profit by it. How many young students are dazzled by a false light of liberty and the promise of a better world? Discussion is allowed, yes, but only up to a certain point. When they are faced with the terrible truth, they either fly or crave for blood. They have taken this road and must follow it to the precipice.

*27th September*

Once again we were set upon by the two repulsive creatures who had come a few days previously. As a greeting they said to me:

'You've got over your malaria?'

'Yes, thank God.'

They sat down and began with a rude question about the funds of the Church and our relations with the government. They tried to make us say that our money was got by fraud or usury.

'If this were so,' I replied, 'it would be ridiculous to rob one section of the community in order to give it to another.'

'Oh, we know what the relations are between you and your State, and really you rob one section and give it to another in order to provide cover for your vile plans.'

They hammered out the words with a nervous arrogance, as if they wanted to say: 'So much the worse for you if you insist on contradicting.'

'As you like,' I replied.

The attendant of the head of the chamber of commerce appeared at the door.

'Excuse me,' I said. 'I must go and visit the sick.'

They turned to the soldier for an explanation.

'Certainly,' he said, 'the Father is a good doctor. He has cured the chief of police and now he is attending the wife of General Pei. He has even seen the mandarin and cured him.'

The soldier's words made a startling impression on them. They got up, bowed deeply and respectfully, then, with friendly smiles, shook my hand.

'Forgive the way we've talked,' they said. 'We've been in the mountains for five years and have forgotten our manners.'

'You are too kind—no harm has been done,' I answered, trying to hide my disgust at their behaviour towards us.

On many other occasions I noticed these providential interruptions, especially during arguments. A word, a sentence, an unexpected change of scene, inexplicable to me, produced what were really miraculous effects. Was it foolish to think of a Superior Being, a God, who came to our help? No!

I asked the head of the chamber of commerce who those two rude fellows were. He told me that they were Commissars and promised to reprimand them.

The attendant took me to General Pei's wife, who had syphilis like everyone else. Coming downstairs, I met the judge's wife, who invited me into 'her house.' I was astonished and thought, 'Does she not live near the prisons?' I went in and found the judge there. He

seemed embarrassed, at my appearance, almost shamefaced. What a magnificent room! I looked about and showed my surprise, much being said by remaining silent! Here was the proof of the sermons the judge had preached us: personal poverty, a miserable life, bad houses—all for the good of the people. While they make the poor 'see the moon in the well,' the Communist bosses live like princes. If only the people knew! But nobody is allowed in. Poor wife who had asked me to have a cup of tea!

28th September

*La Moresina* was almost out of danger and I was sure that she would recover. The little family were so moved that they could not say anything, but their eyes and tears were more expressive than words.

I was asked to go and see General Pei's wife, who, they said, was very ill. I witnessed another brutal scene on the way. There was a meeting of all the inhabitants of a small village some way from the river. On the rostrum there was a woman tied to a chair. She appeared to be dead, her whole body covered with dark red blotches. At her feet, a young man of about twenty held a large iron plate in a pair of pincers.

'You must make her speak. Your mother's blood is the blood of traitors. You must make her speak. Get on with it.'

The youth dropped the iron plate, took another from the brazier, approached his mother, and applied the red-hot metal to her breast. Two great rivulets of melted fat, the sour smell of burning flesh. . . . My God, what torture! . . . In time, perhaps, I too would play my part in such a tragedy. They might make me torture my brethren. I bent my head and fled terrified from the scene.

'It is the most effective system to enable us to triumph. What does it matter if it is necessary to destroy a family or two for the good of the people? A new Communist nation will arise!'

What crimes and what responsibility! I went on my way, but with that appalling sight always before my eyes.

I arrived at General Pei's house. Two sentries took me to him. We shook hands and he invited me to sit down. The very sight of the man alarmed me. It was he who had come to Suiyeh, who had given the order for us to be seized, who had sacked the Mission, who had refused to see the Christians who went to beg for pity. And now I was to save his wife's life. What that brief talk cost me! I felt overmastered by a sense of revolt. But the thought that, even if I were to

show my anger, it would do me no good, and still more, the hope of finding in a generous act some reason for a belief in life, brought peace to my soul.

*30th September*

The judge sent for me. I found him trying a woman. He invited me to come in. I wanted to listen to the case, but he very shrewdly sent away the prisoner and offered me a cigarette.

'Everything has been settled. The work on the hospital is going on. I have sent people to look for more medicines. When your servant arrives with the instruments, we can go ahead.'

'We shall see,' I commented with little enthusiasm.

After dinner a Christian arrived in a state of alarm. He said that the head of the zone had sent a petition asking for our death, because we were upsetting the people, who did not wish to see anything more of us.

It was too soon, I thought; our hour had not yet come; first of all they had to crush us completely. The time we had spent there was valuable, and the thought of having done good to the Christians in the zone consoled us; and the good people knew the truth about us. My mind, by a strange caprice of the imagination, followed a curious line of reasoning. In the grip of an obsession, I felt led to commit a crime—felt the fearful and proverbial attraction of the abyss. Was it natural? I thought of the kind of death that might be reserved for us. There are many tortures used at their gruesome People's Courts—fire, roasting, tearing in pieces by animals, crucifixion, or they might bury us alive, strangle us, shoot us. Among so many tortures, it would be better to be shot. . . . And if we were to be roasted, to die by inches. . . . It was better not to think of it. Time enough when the hour came.

In such gloomy moments, prayer is the best medicine. I got up, took the rosary and went out into the courtyard. The sky was dark, with brilliant stars. The silence of the night was broken by the raucous cries of birds of prey. The beads ran through my fingers while my thoughts were with my beloved dead. My imagination wandered from grave to grave and came to rest on those of my mother and father. I felt an infinite tenderness and a great sob seemed to choke me. I remembered with emotion the prayers for the dead learned at the knee of that saintly woman, my mother. 'It is well for thee, dear Mother, that thou hast flown to Paradise in time. What suffering it would have caused thee if thou hadst still been alive!'

With such tender thoughts came a feeling of weariness. I felt my soul invaded by an infinite peace; the spirit of her great soul brought me rest.

1st October

I got up and saw *La Moresina* at the door of her house and sent her back to bed at once. The General's wife, too, was better.

What an enchanting day it was! The sun seemed to make everything young again. It was four in the afternoon when I got back from visiting the sick. I crossed the river and took a path which led to the hill, so as to enjoy a little freedom. I sat down above a little spring and looked at the lovely view. The hill sloped gently down to the village surrounded by rich green fields. The tremendous rains had given new life to the fertile plain. The persimmon plants, with their beautiful bright green fruit, stood in rows. I saw the roads, the yellowish paths traced through the immense carpet of millet. The silver river wound through the valley and here and there were little villages, like so many toys thrown down by the hand of fate. On all four sides the chains of mountains, like so many splendid courtiers, made a crown for the royal solemnity of nature. How fittingly placed was the statue of Christ above the mausoleum of Monsignor Scarella. No, neither the judge nor all the detestable Communist gang could deprive me of the joy of this beauty.

My soul lost itself in this vision of peace. To enjoy nature it is necessary to climb to an eminence, to detach oneself from the evil power of human passions. Many thoughts passed through my brain; I did not remember that very shortly I should be compelled to descend and to continue to live among the greatest enemies of nature.

2nd October

In the afternoon the servant at last got back. A holiday for us all! Even *La Moresina*, the grandmother and the children were interested and came to hear the news. They looked on us almost as relatives. There were several letters, among them one from our beloved Bishop, Monsignor Chiolino. The news of our capture had been kept from him for some time. Then gradually they told him that we were not dead, that we were well, that we should return in a short time. At his great age, if he had known as soon as the *Pa Lu* had carried us off, it might have been fatal.

What gratitude I owe that saintly man! He loved the district of

Suiyeh so much and came to see us with such pleasure. I read with filial respect and devotion those few lines, written, I could see, in a moment of emotion:

'Dearest martyrs, I send you my blessing. I would send it willingly with my blood. My heart goes out to you.'

That precious piece of paper will go with me to my grave.

There were enough medicines to astonish the judge. We sent for him and gave them to him. He was delighted and went away radiant. At supper we heard that the villain had gone to tell the mandarin.

*3rd October*

To-day there was a pharmaceutical swindle. Among the medicines that had arrived there were some that could be diluted—and there was plenty of good water! I collected all the empty bottles and the pharmacy was doubled, yet still very small for the Communist leaders, who were not few.

I arranged a table with all the medicines, every bottle bearing a beautiful label, some even with a skull and the word 'poison.' Among the medicines that had arrived was some quinine. This was not put into the pool, and my recovery was rapid.

The news of the arrival of so many drugs had excited a great personage, none less than the head of the hospital of Linchi, a thin, yellow young man who had studied medicine in Germany, but had not taken his degree. He came accompanied by his colleague, took an interest in the medicine, congratulated me and invited me to visit his hospital.

'I have many things to ask you,' he said.

After dinner I went to see the General's wife. She seemed entirely out of danger. Four of her friends were there and congratulated me on my skill.

'The skill,' I replied, 'has been shown by the patient. Her system has reacted against the germs, conquered them and cured her.'

I then took my leave.

*4th October*

On the previous day some Christians who wanted to see us had come, but had been driven away by the judge. We thought it would be a good thing if we all went to him and asked for an explanation. He received us very coldly. To our enquiry if Christians could come

and see us or not, he answered with a vague affirmative, which did not sound very reassuring. I plucked up my courage and said:

'If you have anything against it, we shall be grateful if you will tell us. It is not the first time Christians have come to see us and been sent away.'

'Be patient,' he replied. 'Sometimes I am not at home and there are many things that the soldiers don't understand and they behave roughly.'

'They are certainly rough!' I replied.

The scoundrel knew what I meant and an expression of hatred crossed his face, but the time had not yet come to use his claws. Perhaps he would allow the Christians to come sometimes and then the same thing would begin again. After dinner the head of the chamber of commerce sent for me. It was perhaps the only occasion on which I managed to escape from him quickly and get away without becoming involved in an argument. On my way back I saw a man on horseback who looked like a European.

'He's a Russian,' said the people who saw him pass.

Poor Chinese! They have such a contempt for foreigners, and they call Russia their mother. And there are in China many sons of the mysterious and bloody mother, to sow the seeds of the new faith founded on hatred and ruin.

*5th October*

While I was returning from visiting the sick, I met a Christian who told me one of the usual stories of Communist brutality.

A few days before, there was a People's Court in a village near his. It was called to punish a man who had money hidden in his house. During the trial, an old man warned him:

'Don't make a mistake. Think of your future. The troops of the Nationalist government are not far off. When they arrive, vengeance will be taken.'

The words were reported to the Commissar and a trial was held. The old man was seized and put on a table.

'Look to the four points of the compass,' said the Commissar, 'and tell me if you see the regular troops.'

'I see nothing,' said the old man, still unconscious of the cruel joke.

'Bring another table,' ordered the Commissar.

Another was brought and put on top of the first. The old man was made to get on to it and the same order was given—to look for the

regulars. The joke was repeated twelve times—that is to say, until the stock of tables in the village had been piled up.

For the last time, the old man had to climb to the top, and the Commissar repeated the order. Naturally the answer was, ‘No.’ The Commissar turned to the people:

‘What shall we do to this old man who dreams of regular troops?’

A worthy descendent of Cain pushed through the crowd. Approaching the tables he shouted:

‘Kill him!’

He gave a blow to the pile of tables, and the old man crashed down, nearly killed by the fall. A pistol shot, and the unfortunate man was dead.

We approached the village. At the end of the road was the judge’s secretary. The Christian said good-bye to me and turned off on to a path that led to the fields.

‘A pleasant walk,’ I greeted the secretary. ‘How are you?’

‘Listen to me,’ he answered in a frightened way.

He seized my arm and held it like a shipwrecked man in fear of drowning. I had never heard him speak of himself, but now he could restrain himself no longer and burst out with extraordinary bitterness. He told me of his cruel sufferings, of the miserable life he led with his master, of the injustices he had to bear and to see. Knowing him to be well acquainted with the Church, I spoke to him of God, or a future life, of our duty to bear the sufferings of this world while waiting for a day of justice for everyone. He seemed almost transformed and his words showed both wonder and happiness.

‘But these fellows say that God does not exist.’

I saw that the poor fellow was in no state to understand a reasoned argument and tried to comfort him as well as I could. He listened with attention and emotion.

‘It is the first time in my life that I have felt such things,’ he said.

This is the condition to which they have reduced the people; their souls are so crushed that they are unable to react.

*6th October*

To-day the head of the chamber of commerce said to me:

‘So you came brilliantly out of your doctor’s examination. Congratulations!’

I did not understand and asked him to explain.

‘You haven’t visited anyone during these last days?’

'I've made many visits.'

'Didn't you visit five girls—of whom this was one?'

He gave a call and there entered a girl I immediately recognized.

My mind went back to a few days before, when I had been called upon by four girls and what I had thought was a boy of about fifteen. The eldest girl had said that she had malaria and asked me to give her an injection of quinine. Then the one in boy's clothes had asked to be examined and had taken off the heavy quilted coat she wore—so good a disguise that I had fallen into the trap. Not to cause any sensation, I examined her. She seemed to be suffering from tuberculosis. The eldest girl had then taken off her small jacket and asked me to examine her and her other companions. I had done so and found that they were all tubercular. Doubtful of my skill, I had asked some questions. Everything had confirmed my diagnosis, so I had told them the truth. My words had been received with a smile. Apparently I had made a mistake. . . . However . . .

'To-morrow I will bring you some medicine.' And I had sent them away.

The fact had disconcerted and comforted me at the same time. Those girls would doubtless go home and talk disparagingly of my skill. So much the better—it would be one more reason for not going to the hospital. I had thought no more about it.

'After the conference of political chiefs,' said the head of the chamber of commerce, 'we talked about the hospital that we intend to entrust to you, but we wanted some proof of your skill. So we chose these five girls, all declared to be tubercular by two doctors, one German and one American, and sent them to you to be examined.'

Returning home I thought with terror of how this had precipitated matters. Now I was sliding down the slope and it would be difficult to stop my progress.

*7th October*

*La Moresina* was quite well and came to thank me. Poor woman, if she had come to have her head cut off she could not have been in a greater state of agitation. After saying, 'er—er—er,' she managed to get out some words. I tried to rescue her from her embarrassment (she was even perspiring!), and then she started and talked and talked and talked. Finally she exhausted her vocabulary, wiped off the perspiration and went away.

Shortly afterwards the grandmother, more accustomed to 'society,' came with the younger girl, who had a basket of prize persimmons, which she pushed towards me and then went to hide behind her grandmother, who overwhelmed me with thanks. I put an end to her compliments by asking for He-lou, the elder girl.

'She is not very well,' they said.

'That delicate girl has caught the illness from her mother,' I said and went at once to see her.

Unfortunately she appeared to be suffering from typhus. The thanks turned into prayers and I promised to do everything I could to save her.

*8th October*

I had another discussion with the head of the chamber of commerce. It arose from an article in the newspaper. 'The Communist Government receives the representatives of three religions: Christianity, Buddhism and Mohammedanism.' It seemed to me a good opportunity to enquire into the question of religious freedom. There were too many cases of injustice to Christians, not only when they came to see us, but also in their own homes. We knew that at Hsiao-chuang the Communists had sequestered the Mission and the seminary, had violated the graves, and had sequestered land belonging to the Santa Infanzia. They forbade the Christians to meet for prayer, took the holy statues from the houses and punished those discovered praying. And all this in spite of the law that proclaims the Freedom of Religion. This being the state of things, the generous concession of the government to the above-mentioned religions was a farce—like so many other government actions. The classic example is the legislation about commerce: 'All can engage in it, all are entitled to make money.' That all can engage in it is true, but that all can enjoy the fruits of their labours is an illusion. So the news in the paper was a lie.

I expressed to the head of the chamber of commerce my pleasure at this happy event and the help and protection that would be given, especially to the Catholic religion.

'I hope,' I said to him, 'that the decision will have good practical results. You know what happened a few days ago.'

I then spoke to him of the many places where Christians were being persecuted, simply because they were Christians. He frowned and shook his head.

'Your law is quite clear,' I pointed out.

'Yes, there is the law, but we are superior to the law. It is useful, we use it. It is not useful, or an obstacle to our work, we destroy it.'

In the Communist world, it is silly to argue.

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I did not find a Communist—I am speaking of the chiefs—who did not sing the praises of the Catholic Church. I do not attach much importance to this, for the simple reason that, as the Church has always done good, it would be necessary to deny the evidence of history or to be blinded by hatred to maintain the contrary. And the Communists know the history of the Church very well. They also know that they are faced by a great organization that cannot be defeated. In the hope that they can injure, and if possible destroy it, they have sent and are still sending students to Catholic universities in other countries. These students are so well grounded in Communism that there is no fear of their 'going astray.' Their object is to study the structure, the methods and the doctrine of the Church. It has often fallen to me to argue with this new type of protagonists of the Communism tenets. At first I thought I was confronted by renegade Christians; they seemed so well instructed in religious questions. I would have persisted in this misconception if they had not said:

'We are not, and never shall be, Christians. We study your religion only to fight it.'

In the course of the argument, the crucial point on which the Communist attack breaks down is the altruistic life of the missionary. They have heard of this, so they follow him, spy on him and they see him put into practice the charity he preaches. To them he is an inexplicable being; and when they have taken him, put him to the torture and killed him, they have hardly been able to conceal their terror, or have done so with that nauseating arrogance that is the result of trying to stifle at any cost an unexpected, annoying feeling—a sense of guilt before an unarmed victim.

Face to face with religion, there is only one thing they understand: that the Catholic Church is a dangerous shadow, an alarming enemy. So they concentrate all their forces against it in an effort to destroy it. The tactics are always the same; the story of the outrages they have committed is not so important as the knowledge of the methods adopted.

Before being imprisoned, I ventured from time to time to enter the Communist zone. It was only for short visits, and probably my

presence was concealed from the non-Christians. I chose days when I did not expect to meet Communist soldiers, and crossed the frontier in the evening, returning early the next morning.

The Communists generally found out about my visit after I had left the zone. After one visit the Christians told me of the sensation it had caused.

'The Communists want you to stay longer in the district. They say they would like to know you. They are surprised that you are afraid. They say that they protect the Catholic religion. Father, don't listen to them. Every compliment is a betrayal.'

I proved the truth of this.

One adventure among the many that happened to me—of course before my imprisonment—was at the end of September 1944, when I was called to a place in the Communist zone only two *li* from the great trench dug by the Japanese. With its closeness to the frontier, I thought this village was relatively safe, but the morning after my arrival I was drinking a bowl of millet broth when a Christian arrived:

'Father, the Communists are coming!'

I made a bundle of the sacred vessels and vestments, jumped on my bicycle and, followed by the schoolmaster, left the village unobserved. I had hardly reached the Japanese zone when a party of mounted soldiers followed me, galloping in the trench as hard as they could. I reached the top of a hill and stopped, thinking that the Communists would not dare to cross the frontier.

'Father,' said the master, 'don't trust them.'

A sudden burst of firing confirmed his words. We fled down the road on the opposite side of the hill. My poor bicycle! Fortunately it was made in Italy!

A week later, a Christian came and said to me:

'Father, if you had delayed another ten minutes, you would now be in the Communists' hands. A party turned up at the place where you were saying Mass, and in their usual gentle way began to look for you. They said they wanted to welcome you, while the officer in command surrounded the village and blocked all the roads.'

In the villages near the frontier, the Christians were not much interfered with. They were forbidden to meet on Sundays, but they could pray and hang up sacred images—tolerance that is easily understandable. The districts were in the Communist zone, but there was nothing to prevent the Japanese from making raids, especially when they knew of the presence of Red troops. All this interfered consider-

ably with Communist propaganda, so the Political Commissars and the propagandists limited themselves to creating an anti-Japanese spirit among the people, while not demanding contributions for the upkeep of the army. The situation in the interior, which the Japanese never reached, was very different. I had heard this from the Christians and was now able to see for myself.

In the recently conquered zones the Communists were at first very careful not to come up against the religious feeling of the people. They had first to debase their souls and, in order to succeed in this, they ostentatiously announced in the papers and at meetings: 'Everyone is free to follow what religion he prefers,' or: 'We protect religion.' After a time, this false benevolence was replaced by a solicitude even more detestable: 'Food must be earned by work, so no one must waste time.' Sunday gatherings were suppressed, churches and schools were commandeered, orders were issued to seize all religious pictures and statues in the houses. As time passed, the poison was increased till it was openly announced: 'We don't want any religion. Down with the superstitions!'

During the height of the propaganda campaign, and therefore the period of the greatest hatred, the orders were given for murder and destruction. An old woman, surprised burning little sticks of incense before a small pagoda rebuilt with great difficulty and against the orders of the chief, was condemned as a criminal, as was also a Christian who did not obey the order to destroy all the sacred images.

I saw, however, that despite so much persecution, Christians and pagans alike did not submit willingly and followed the natural instinct to pray to God and the spirits. Besides the ruthless methods adopted to destroy 'superstition' in the souls of the people, the Communists very often used this word. For some time, however, it seemed that this had been abandoned because of a story, which was known to everybody. I do not know whether it was true or created by popular imagination. The Christians believed it because they had heard it from eye-witnesses.

In the Christian village near the Mission of Luan, ran the story, the People's Commissars wished at all cost to prevent the Christians from going to church to hear Mass. While the Chinese priest was explaining the Gospel, one of the Commissars entered the church and, pointing a revolver at the preacher, forced him to leave the pulpit.

'I will preach to you to-day.'

So saying, the Commissar went up into the pulpit. He stretched out

his hands, meaning to accompany the gesture with a word, but no word came. A second Commissar, seeing the unfortunate man suddenly struck dumb, approached the pulpit shouting:

'Have you become a Christian, too! If you don't want to speak, get out of the pulpit and I'll speak.'

As he said this, he fired and killed the other Commissar. He entered the pulpit and opened his mouth. It remained half-open—he too was struck dumb.

Telling this story, the Christians used to end it by saying:

'But why does not God perform such miracles in every village?'

There were three of us priests. The Communists knew that we celebrated Mass very early each morning, that the Christians made their confessions when they came. Up to that time, we had not been interfered with, but this tolerance was easy to explain. They needed the medicines, they wanted them at any price and they knew how to wait. One day, when their needs were satisfied, our calvary would begin. We three would be condemned because we had dared 'to punish the people with penitences after confession--a most unjust act and against the law.' Or else they would shout:

'Death to the traitors, the friends of the Japanese! Death to the European devils who will not allow people to work on Sundays!' These words had already been shouted against the missionaries, while we were waiting our turn. It must be admitted that the Communists are very clever at temporizing while waiting for the solution—and the only solution is death. Meanwhile the victim, in a confusion of discordant feelings and sensations, studies desperately all that he sees, all that happens around him. He feels alone and isolated, but at the same time crushed by an indescribable nightmare caused by the watchfulness of his tyrants. The eye of Communism is more terrible than its iron chains.

'If I were to ask them,' I wrote, '"When are you going to kill me?" the answer would be, "But we don't kill anyone." That is their aim. It is only a question of time. Short or long, it is an interlude during which they leave the missionary to foresee more or less his tragic end. For us three, this—and I am not speaking of the grave dug a few days ago—is part of a logical plan. From the slogans that from time to time are shouted at us with true Communist politeness, for the decisions about us at the meetings, we can deduce our inevitable fate.

'We are not in our own house, therefore we are at least spared

(what irony!) the annoyance of being incessantly pestered by rough scoundrels who want a house, a church, a school, a table, a lamp . . .

My mind went to so many other missionaries, far more unfortunate than we, who were in the custody of those tigers waiting to tear them to pieces. For them there was no interlude—or rather, an interlude filled with disgusting insults and disgraceful treatment.

This happened. The missionary who worked in one of the villages of Weihui had been under Communist control for some time, but in the beginning had not suffered very much. He had, however, to give up the boys' and girls' schools, and, for large meetings, even the church. The taxes he had to pay were stupefying. As he was not able to pay, the schools, the church and the house he lived in were seized, leaving him with a small hovel that served as home, church and school. He spent his days surrounded by a gang paid or compelled to torment and threaten him. The chief of police, the mandarin and other Communist leaders posed as sympathizers, their hypocritical kindness seemingly inspired by the devil himself.

One day the mandarin came to see the missionary and the following conversation took place:

'I regret to see you reduced to this state. If you wish, we can help you.'

'Very well,' replied the missionary. 'Give me back my church, my house and my school.'

'But it is not we who have taken them. It is the people who have decided on this action. The people are the great and only masters.'

'If the people are the great and only masters,' insisted the missionary, 'why cannot my Christians come and see me?'

While he was speaking, he heard a confused murmur of threats and curses in the courtyard.

'You hear?' said the mandarin. 'The people are shouting against you. What can I do?'

Meanwhile the mob had gathered round the gate and battered it down.

'Death to the European devil, the murderer, the dog of a stranger!'

The mandarin pretended to be terrified, looked at the poor missionary, turned to the agitators and tried to speak, but his voice was drowned by shouts and curses. Having finished his part in the comedy, he withdrew, leaving the missionary in the hands of the excited and bloodthirsty rabble. Despite the danger, some Christians tried to save the missionary, but were beaten till they were a mass of blood.

This horrible performance had been staged by the mandarin himself, with the help of the chief of police who directed the proceedings in the courtyard. The orders were to knock down and beat the foreign devil, but not to kill him. They were carried out to the letter: he was treated in the most horrible way and then carried off. Nobody knows where he is now.

I asked the head of the chamber of commerce more than once for news of him. The answer was complete silence. I then asked some of the other chiefs and one of them replied:

'He has gone to his own house.'

An ambiguous and frightening phrase. When I heard it, I mentally reviewed the last tragic moments of Father Osnaghi of the Mission of Kaifeng. Compelled to dig his own grave, he was told by the black-guards who helped him in this melancholy task:

'Good. Now you can go to your own house.'

The unfortunate man, with the fear of death in his heart, was overwhelmed with joy and began to give thanks. Two minutes later, he was buried alive with his faithful and heroic schoolmaster. Such equivocal phrases are used before they murder their prisoners, and the Communists repeat them with such savage politeness that life is more terrible than death itself.

When it has been decided to kill a priest of the Catholic Church, the chiefs and the propagandists disappear (the sight of the innocent is frightening!) and the bloodhounds are left in command—creatures trained in every wickedness, ignorant of everything except a smattering of Communist catchwords—who treat the foreign devil in such a way as to cause him the maximum of suffering. They ask him disgusting and extraordinary questions, and if he is not bewildered by them or surprised into contradicting himself, they try a new form of attack—the confusion of religion with sorcery and witchcraft. With the obvious pose of humble disciples, they ask for explanations.

'What are the Gospels? Why is your Pope against Communism? What is meant by confession, by communion? Why can only a priest say Mass?'

The questions must be answered: they are asked twice, thrice, a dozen times, the inquisitors repeating what they have heard, mixing up Mass with public meetings, confession with banal and obscene stories, the communion with the food and alcoholic drinks of the wizards. Someone then demands that Mass should be celebrated on the spot, so that he can receive communion. Refusal serves as a fresh

opportunity for abuse, and the ignorant pupil assumes the character of the merciless judge.

'But am not I also one of the people? Why should you not give me what you give to those dogs who follow you? You are unjust, not worthy to live, because you deceive simple and ignorant people, but you don't deceive us, because we are as clever as you are.'

The sermon continues *ad nauseam* until the Communist has exhausted his vocabulary and proceeds to deeds.

There is another aspect of the Communist attack: the determination to plunder and seize the churches, residences and Missions, and in the end to rid themselves of the troublesome strangers.

I have already mentioned here and there the troubles that Communism creates for the missionaries, to prevent the preaching of the Gospel —troubles clearly prompted by ill-will, which must be concealed as long as possible. The Communists have discovered that the laws of charity and patience preached by the foreign devils can be of the greatest use to them. As we have seen, they exhaust their enemy by endless discussions and chatter; they carefully watch the self-control that the missionary must exercise to master his righteous disgust; and, when they think that his patience is worn out, they try to anger him with requests for different articles and sometimes buildings.

'We need a table. Lend us yours.'

While one of them is looking for a table, another says:

'The people don't want you here any longer. They don't want your religion or your school, so we will send our masters to your school.'

A third says: 'The soldiers have arrived and we want wood. Give us your shrubs. You shall have the honour of welcoming our general. Give him your room and find another for yourself.'

Such stupid and ridiculous demands go on all day and are repeated more insistently on the second, third and fourth days. The poor missionary must have great strength of will to remain calm and not provoke the wickedness of his tormentors, but he is a man like other men and, notwithstanding his efforts, perhaps involuntarily lets drop a word or a sentence with as kind a smile as possible. Sometimes not able to bear it any more, he complains.

'Ah!' cry the Communists, 'then what they say is true. You are a false teacher of Christ's religion. You preach patience, but you don't practise it. You impose upon our people for your subversive ends. Your Christ said that you were to be charitable, but you are not charitable. How can we believe in you any more? The house you live

in, your school, your church are the fruits of trickery. Your frauds have ruined the poor people who follow you.'

I wrote: 'A gruesome vision passes before my eyes: a cauldron in which a condemned man is being boiled; a grave dug a second time; an inhuman beast dragging a man along a road covered with stones between two lines of a bloodthirsty mob. There are torn shreds of flesh, his head bumps against the rough ground, his arms move and his fingers clutch the earth like claws seeking for a stone or a stump. . . . The cries of pain, of desperation, the face bruised and broken, the eyes and mouth covered with blood and mud. . . . I see a man in the power of his murderers, tied hand and foot to four animals. . . . A blow of a whip, a death cry, a wrench at the limbs of the victim. . . . The movement of the animals . . . They tear the legs apart. . . . All this is reserved for me, for the other two priests. . . .

'How many times this month have I been impatient with the judge? They cannot demand our house, our school, our church—all are already in their possession. They want the medicines, the hospital. And they wait patiently. Their needs once satisfied, we shall enter the death-chamber. The darkness of misery and terror invades my soul. Why must men be so wicked?

'Another frightening thought. The Communists, to make the scene more gruesome, will compel our Christians to act as our executioners. It has been done elsewhere, and we cannot hope to be an exception to the rule. Then they will publish in their papers:

"Three traitors the fewer. The followers of the foreign devils have seen that they had been deceived, and they have risen and done justice for the wrongs they have suffered."

'Many times I have asked myself why I am compelled by a power that seems stronger than I am to remember and write all that I have seen, felt and thought in this Communist world. The nearer I see myself to my last day, the more do I feel a fearful revolt within me, mingled with an inexpressible hate. I do not know what psychological law is working in me. I always reach the same conclusion: either I am mad or I have some unconscious hope of freedom.'

## CHAPTER

# 9

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*9th October 1945*

THE judge came and once again began the boring discussion about the medicines. He wished me to send the servant to Changte.

'He is ill,' I said, 'and cannot go at present.'

The words were like a blow in the face to a rude little boy; the results were soon to be seen. They beat the Christians who wanted to see us. Some brutal soldiers on the surrounding wall shouted:

'We'll bury you alive.'

Towards evening, when the servant went to get some water from the public cistern, he heard people talking about us. They were complaining that they had helped us, treated us well, yet we showed ourselves to be opposed to Communism and were so rude to the chiefs. *La Moresina* said that the judge had sent for her and demanded information about us and what we did when the Christians came.

'Take care to come and tell me everything that happens in your house,' he said as he dismissed her.

The knots were tightening, but I did not think that the end was near, though I could not hide a certain apprehension. It was easy to be brave when I was alone and undisturbed. If it really came to a crisis, would I be brave? Would I act up to the character I bore? The grave-digging joke was before me as a terrible warning.

*10th October*

I went to see the head of the chamber of commerce and asked if they were annoyed with us. His only reply was that the mandarin was impatient to see the hospital finished and in working order. So the situation was not hopeless.

I went home and gave this good news to my companions. We felt calmer, but everyone who came was a source of alarm.

Towards evening Father Perottoni and Father Monti went out for

a breath of air. I was in the courtyard saying my breviary, when I heard a clamour of happy voices—a most unusual sound! I went to the gate and saw the two Fathers standing smiling in the middle of a knot of little boys! I asked what was happening and Father Monti at last succeeded in telling me that all the boys in the village had been with the judge in a field, but when they had seen the two Fathers go by, they had suddenly left the judge, the lawyers, and the officials of the People's Court. They had run to meet the priests, gone for a little walk with them, and then brought them home in triumph.

We had been in the village for three months. Everyone knew and respected us, especially the boys, who perhaps distinguished more clearly between us and the Communists. Every morning, when I left the village, everyone greeted me with the awkward politeness of people from the mountains. This unexpected demonstration of affection for us by the boys was an extraordinary thing. The judge must have been astonished.

*La Moresina* and the grandmother were enthusiastic about what had happened. Speaking of it, *La Moresina* said, calmly and solemnly:

'We weren't there, but those little rascals are ours, they belong to our villages, and what they did to you was as if we had done it. Never since the Communists have been here has such a thing happened.'

How great is the power of righteousness!

The incident dispelled the clouds of fear that had oppressed us so constantly during the last days.

11th October

That morning, in bed with malaria, I was visited by two of the five famous girls with tuberculosis who had played the malicious joke on me a few days previously. I took advantage of the opportunity to ask them some questions. They were wholehearted Communists. One of them sprang up and said with enthusiasm:

'I have not yet given my life for Communism. I am tubercular, I suffer from stomach trouble and malaria, but what does this matter if Communism triumphs?'

I tried to calm her and advised her to take care of her health.

'Mao Tse-tung is my life,' she declared, raising her clenched fist.

I felt as if I were in the presence of someone possessed by an evil spirit.

In the evening, when Father Perottoni and Father Monti were out, they met a soldier with a sub-machine gun on his shoulder. When he saw them he stopped.

'Are you the prisoners from Suiyeh? Where's the third? What are you doing walking about like this? Haven't you been buried yet? Traitors! Oppressors of the people!'

*12th October*

The Christian, Ma Shan, came to-day, and while he was telling us the news, the judge arrived. As he talked to us, he kept on staring at Ma Shan. Then he shouted questions at him—his name, why he had come, etc. The judge was obviously planning something, so it was essential to save Ma Shan.

'Judge,' I interrupted, 'to-day I should like to send the servant for some more medicines.'

He became calm and did not seem to remember Ma Shan. Despite its very ugly moments, life had some amusing interludes. One had only to mention the hospital and medicines, and this man became lamb-like and ridiculous.

A moment after the judge had left, a Christian woman—the wife of Sin Pi, ex-servant of the Mission at Hsiaochuang—appeared. Sin Pi, poor fellow, had been in prison for more than a year, his most serious crime, apart from having been a follower of the European dogs, having been to hide the radio-set and the treasures of the Mission—a charge that was quite untrue. The unfortunate woman, alone with her two babies, was labelled as the wife of a criminal. A daughter of Christian parents, she was alive to her position. She suffered, but was happy because her husband had been imprisoned for having defended the priests and his religion.

*13th October*

A young man appeared with a large sore on his leg. I asked him some questions in order to find out about his general state of health. The poor fellow, who knew and trusted us, answered with a sigh of relief because he was at last able to speak freely:

'I had eighty-five perches of land when the Communists arrived here. I did not know what they were like; I only knew that they were Chinese like me. I very soon realized that it was a crime to own so much land. They held a People's Court and I was punished. They abused me and said: "We shall go to your farm and make you run. The amount of land that you can cover will be your property." I had been beaten during the Court, and, as it had snowed heavily, it was very difficult to see any unevenness in the ground. I started to run

with all the strength I had left, but at a certain point the cold and my exhaustion made me shut my eyes. I stumbled and fell. I was beaten till I got up and they forced me to go home. I was ill for several months. Finally, I got well, but the sore in my leg has never healed. I have spent a great deal of money, but instead of getting better, it has got worse.'

Here was one of the many, but not one of the worst, stories of what was happening every day. I tried to cheer him up, promising to cure him. The reason why the sore had not healed was very simple: the Chinese doctors had used the most disgusting so-called remedies, and the infection had naturally increased instead of dispersing. I took a bistoury and cleaned the wound well, washed it, dusted it with iodoform, and bandaged it. The patient was most grateful, and went away saying in a most mysterious tone of voice:

'Father, you must not tell anyone what you have heard from me to-day.'

After dinner there was another incident. Eight Christians arrived from Kukao, a Christian district near Suiyeh, and the soldiers at the gate drove them away. They hid themselves outside the village in a wood, determined not to go away without seeing us.

About five o'clock I went out as usual, feeling that someone was waiting for me. I had only taken a few steps along a path that led to the fields, when I heard;

'Shenfu. . . . Shenfu. . . .'

I knew them, poor fellows. They knelt down, crying and laughing. I took them into our prison.

*14th October*

A very good day. We had a number of Christians, eight from Suiyeh and seven from Tienchiaching. These last we had never seen, but the faith that unites hearts bound them to us from the first moment and we loved each other like brothers, without a shadow of suspicion. I saw them on their knees, devoutly assisting at Mass and singing the prayers with fervour in preparation for the Sacrament, joy shining in those almond-shaped eyes. It was a holy consolation for me. I did not go out, refused to see anyone, and spent the time with my Christians until they left.

The parting was most moving. I accompanied them for some distance beyond the village, for fear the devil's satellites would follow them. We parted, promising to meet again soon. I stopped and watched

them until they had crossed the river and disappeared behind the broken arches of the bridge. I returned full of happiness.

It was, perhaps, the first time I had not longed for death. The longing for life almost choked me.

*15th October*

There was that morning an example of what a boy educated on Communist principles could be like. A well-dressed man appeared, leading by the hand a limping boy of about ten, with bright eyes, but a very curious expression for one of his age.

'Look at this swelling,' said the man, taking off the boy's shoe.

There was a deep sore on the instep, the edges being violet-coloured, but there was no inflammation. Inside there was a crop of tiny fungi, all characteristic signs of syphilis. I approached with everything necessary to disinfect and medicate the foot.

'Don't touch!' said the boy firmly.

'My dear child,' I said, 'you mustn't talk like that.'

The man who was the father of this worthy offspring intervened. The boy cursed, cried, and kicked like a little mule. I called Father Monti, who grasped the boy firmly in his arms. I took hold of the foot and operated. Curses, threats, insults flowed from the little devil's mouth; then suddenly he became quiet, stretched out his leg and said:

'Do what you like.'

His foot bandaged, he got down from the chair and went away with the air of an important person who has been offended. His father followed him laughing and without a word of reproof.

After dinner, I heard a child crying despairingly. It was the same boy, walking arm-in-arm with his mother like a wounded duckling. He was put on the chair again, but he quickly jumped down, rushed to the door and ran away. His mother followed him shouting. I caught him and brought him back, and there ensued a disgraceful scene between him and his mother. With the most shocking curses, he tore his mother's clothes and scratched the breast from which he had drawn life. It was horrible, and the courtyard quickly filled with curious onlookers. Finally, calm was established, and I asked why he had come back. Then the mother gave vent to her wrath.

'I made a mistake,' she said to me. 'I asked the Communists that this boy should be educated according to their method. I gave him to them in the hope that he would grow up a good Communist. Instead he is worse than the children of the richest bourgeois.'

She then began to rail against the middle class.

'The capitalists, who, in spite of all the Communist laws, have left in the blood of the new people the germs of their silly education.'

'It is not the middle class,' I told her. 'It is not the germs of his ancestors that you see in your son, but the terrible consequences of the principles of the Communism on which you founded such hopes.'

In speaking, the woman had said 'we' as if I, too, was a Communist! She went away swearing that one day she would take her son and bury him alive.

'You can both be buried together,' I said to myself. 'Your son will not change and the sin is not, as you believe, in the bad blood of the middle class, but it is yours and the principles of Communism that you profess.'

Her reaction had been most surprising. The astonishment of discovering that I was not a Communist, and the suspicion that her son had really been ruined by the holy laws of Communism, produced a moral disintegration in her. How many other foolish women had deserted their homes and thrown themselves into this attractive world of unbridled licence, living simply according to their natural instincts, with the prospect of being discarded when these same instincts no longer bore fruit?

*16th October*

Another summons by the head of the chamber of commerce. This time I was needed to prescribe for two well-dressed women, obviously the wives of some Communist chief. I was naturally the object of the greatest interest to this pair. They had heard a great deal about the Catholic Church, but had never come into direct contact with it. They asked me if I was a doctor by profession.

'No,' I said, 'I am a priest.'

The head of the chamber of commerce explained. Their astonishment increased and with it a desire for more information. My discourse interested them and at the same time created the agitation felt by those who find themselves on the edge of an abyss. They asked very few questions, so I was able to present my remarks in an orderly way, until an unknown man, whom I had never seen there previously, interrupted me with:

'What you say is true according to your philosophy. Before Christ, a different state of things existed. Christ revolutionized the world

and, with the decadence of philosophy, succeeded in time in putting the whole world in chains.'

I remarked that before Christ there was an ethical and theological philosophy founded on the principles of Plato and Aristotle.

'That is true,' he answered. 'Those principles existed, but in a very different form. You have interpreted and adapted them to your way of thinking.'

'Then how should they be explained?' I asked.

'We do not explain them. We are not interested in such absurd principles. They are contrary to our system, which is unique and infallible. The world must be eternally grateful to the famous Marx, who first of all shook off the yoke of your philosophy. Lenin understood the indisputable clarity of Marx's principles and forced the world to accept them.'

'Philosophy,' I answered, 'is born and developed by discussion, on which it depends for the solution of the problems that face men every day. A philosophic system that forbids discussion is absurd and finally becomes ridiculous.'

'Oh, yes,' he replied ironically, 'your philosophy is imposed on people by discussion. Free discussion? The Inquisition massacred half the world. Who could discuss with Charlemagne, when, sword in hand, he offered half Europe the choice: baptism or death?'

'You must admit that the Church is a society composed of men, and in human organizations—even the best—there are defects, but they do not destroy the soundness of the principles or the organization itself.'

He got up and said with the air of a bankrupt prophet:

'The days of your decrepit philosophy are over! The world has been wrong for centuries, but now it sees clearly in the light of Communism.'

He shook hands and apologized for not being able to continue the discussion, but he had important business to attend to, and went away. There was a moment's silence broken by a deep sigh from the two women.

I asked the head of the chamber of commerce who the man was. He said that he was a very learned person with an important post in the government, and had studied in Europe.

The soul of Communism is guided in its development by such people as he, who have learned in Europe only what is evil in its atheistic and material philosophy.

17th October

The judge was most anxious that I should visit three girls in an interesting condition, and had been insisting on this for several days. I had always succeeding in avoiding such visits, giving as my reason that I knew nothing on the subject. Now he was so insistent that, with the agreement of my two companions, I consented, but only on condition that I was not expected to examine them.

The girls were in the judge's house. It is not worth while to talk of the luxury with which this cunning blackguard had surrounded himself, trying to conceal it as much as possible. I had hardly arrived when he said to one of the three girls, who were all barely eighteen:

'Here is the doctor who has come to examine you.'

Saying this, he went up to her and without any shame tried to take off her clothes. I endeavoured to stop him, but he paid no attention, leaving her with very little on. She, poor thing, was very embarrassed to find herself in such hands and in such a situation. Faced by his shameless conduct, my soul burned within me. I seized him by the arm and said firmly:

'This is not the way to treat a poor girl, whoever she may be, when she is in such a condition.'

I took a blanket and threw it over her. She turned her face to the wall and burst into tears.

The libertine smiled at me, not concealing his hatred. If previously this man had hidden his real self, he now appeared in the livery of Satan. I hoped that he would not dare to come and see us for some time. A terrible thought pursued me all day: if he had arranged this disgusting joke, it must have been with some object.

18th October

Those days had been filled for the poor *Moresina* with the greatest anxiety, for her daughter had been dangerously ill. Now, however, she was out of danger, was hungry, and wanted to get up. Her mother had been very frightened, coming to me every morning to enquire about the course of the illness.

After dinner three men arrived. I felt I had seen them before, and tried to recall their faces, but did not succeed. When I asked them where they came from, their answer was curious. They said it was not their fault and asked my forgiveness. Still puzzled and suspicious, I thought of Suiyeh and repeated my question.

'We are from Peichingshi.'

Ah, the place where we were surprised during our attempt to escape, stripped, and taken to the public stage. Now they were asking me for medicine. I was so upset that I did not know what to do. It was difficult to hold my tongue, but perhaps my silence would awaken a little remorse in them for what they had done. I gave them the medicine they wanted and sent them away without asking for a penny.

In the evening the judge sent his secretary. He wanted me to prepare some sterilized cotton wool for one of the unfortunate girls I had seen that morning. He did not dare to come himself and I hoped this would go on for several days.

*19th October*

Even in the Communist world there are some people who are tired. My first visit was to the head of the chamber of commerce. Now that there was a certain amount of friendship between us, I was able to talk to him more or less freely. I thought that what I had said had awakened some doubts in his mind, though he did his best to convince me of the truth of theories in which perhaps he himself had ceased to believe. In the middle of an argument, a girl whom I had cured some time ago came out of the next room. She passed us, welcomed me and thanked me for what I had done, but her manner showed that she was thinking of something else.

I got back about midday and was surprised at the number of patients who were waiting for me. I was busy the whole afternoon. Towards evening, while I was saying my office, a woman flung herself on my back. Startled by this wild behaviour I rose to my feet and retreated towards the door. In the dusk I recognized the girl I had seen that morning.

‘You must save me!’ she cried.

Perhaps she was suffering from a new attack of her illness? Was she in search of medicine?

‘No,’ she said, sobbing, ‘it is not that I want.’

I felt suspicious and as a precaution, made to cross the threshold. The Communists have innumerable ways of ruining people. The unfortunate girl understood my movement and said at once:

‘It is not what you think. I want to escape and you must help me.’

My suspicions increased.

‘You must know,’ she went on. ‘Tell me the name of the place nearest to the frontier.’

She was in such a state of excitement that I found it difficult to

believe in her sincerity. I replied that I too was a prisoner and did not know what to do.

'It's not a trick. Only tell me the name of a place outside the Communist zone.'

She sounded so desperate that I was finally convinced of her sincerity.

'Have you told anyone that you plan to escape?'

'No, not a living soul knows anything.'

'Why don't you appeal to someone better able to help you?'

'They are all traitors,' she answered, and told me such a horrifying story that I think it is better not to write it down.

'What have you been doing lately?'

'I was a People's Commissar.'

'But aren't the People's Commissars free?'

'Completely! Wherever I went, four people followed me day and night. They spied on me, took a note of everything I said and did—all this without my suspecting or having any idea who they were. Unfortunately, I talk in my sleep, and to discover what I thought, they put me to sleep against my will.' She cried out like a mad woman: 'Cursed be Communism! Cursed be its chiefs! Cursed be myself!'

Fortunately, there was no one in the courtyard.

'Tell me! Tell me the name of the place nearest to the frontier, so that I can get out of this hell! Tell me, for the love of your God!'

Never in my life have I been a prey to such violent emotions. It was like a scene in a novel. As I had learned it from the Christians, I told her the name of the place, warning her to be careful and to keep to deserted paths. If she walked quickly and with the nervous energy that she was showing at that moment, she could reach her goal in a night.

'I thank you, and may your God bless you!'

She went away, her excitement and agitation making her seem like a lost soul.

I followed her with my thoughts and good wishes. I got up and went into the courtyard, feeling as if I had had a nightmare. What terrible experiences one had to face.

*20th October*

There are moments in a man's life when he seems to have two wills. One of these postulates causes and consents to them, wishing at the same time, that the effects of these causes will be trifling or non-existent. I have noticed and known this torment. The Communists had discovered a contemptible quality in me, one that was very useful

to them. They were persuaded that I was a famous doctor, and when I tried to behave like one, my mind enjoyed grappling with the problems; there was the pride that wanted success for the sake of my own glory, while the better part of my nature desired a resounding failure. I treated patients and operated, and by a strange chance the Communists became more and more convinced of my skill. They had the result before their eyes. Would my successes give me a hope of freedom, or would they cause my ruin? Unfortunately I knew that the Communists could control my actions so completely that to expect to be able to escape would be like claiming the power to rise from the grave.

I saw myself being forced onto this slippery slope and sliding down it towards a horrible fate. To stop? To deny what I had done? It would have been ridiculous. And now? Here were reasons for torment and apprehension. And when the soul is a prey to this disorder the whole being suffers. I had to fight against it, but my efforts seemed useless.

21st October

The maize harvest. I behaved like the Communists; I forgot for the moment to be the famous doctor and satisfied a longing to do entirely different work, far removed from the preoccupations of every day.

The poor family who housed us were in difficulties, the grandmother worried and grumbling:

‘The millet is ruined, the beans are miserable, the maize is being eaten by the birds. What I suffer for lack of a man!’

I noticed her agitation and helped her as best I could. Accompanied by six young Christians who had brought some firewood, I went to the fields.

‘If you like,’ I said to the old woman, ‘we will help you. We’ve come to harvest the maize.’

‘But you’ll get dirty. It is not work for you.’

‘No more polite speeches! Come along, boys, let’s get to work.’

The grandmother was so touched that she mixed up the cobs with the leaves! After dinner, Father Perottoni and Father Monti came to help.

At home *La Moresina* and her daughter stripped the cobs slowly. The courtyard was filled with an enormous pile of maize, and there was the bitter, characteristic smell of it in the air. It was a pleasant distraction that lasted for several days. The sight of three Europeans working so hard created a great sensation, and everyone talked about us with admiration. This annoyed the Communists.

'Always talking to those European devils?' said a soldier to a group of people. 'Perhaps it wasn't we who liberated you and helped you?'

'It's not the same thing,' said an old man with the readiness born of a philosophy not learned in books.

22nd October

I witnessed another gruesome scene. There was a rumour that the Nationalist government was sending agents into the Communist zone to poison the wells. The people were frightened and all the roads were closely watched. Yesterday one of these supposed poisoners was surprised. He was a young man from the province of Shansi who was travelling on business and, being tired, sat down beside a well. Perhaps he sat there too long.

'That is a poisoner of our wells,' said the boys.

The rumour spread through the village, suspicion increased and soon the story was believed to be true. The man protested, but he was bound, a Court was held and he was condemned to be crucified against the wall of the village. The execution was fixed for that day, market day. With this mockery of a trial, the sentence had already been given by the people and the people are always right, so the man was killed. He cried, struggled, shrieked, but in vain. He was crucified and stoned to death.

Things went badly that day, even for Father Perottoni. He went out to administer extreme unction and suffered many indignities. He was stopped, questioned, and not allowed to pass, until, fortunately, a good brigand guaranteed that the Father would return.

23rd October

There was a little unpleasantness in the family—the ordinary disagreement between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law that usually blows over quickly. The grandmother was rather annoyed at seeing *La Moresina* sitting in the sun in the courtyard all day. *La Moresina*, still only convalescent, gave a sharp answer. The two women got angry and high words passed. Most unfortunately, one of the judge's soldiers was present at the end of the quarrel, and calm had hardly been restored before the judge sent for *La Moresina*'s younger daughter and wanted to know what had happened. Luckily the little girl contradicted what the soldier had reported and made the judge believe that it had been some ridiculous little discussion in the family.

Sometimes these trivial differences reported by children cause the disruption of an entire family.

## CHAPTER

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AMONG the obstacles to its development that Communism has encountered in China, one of the most formidable is the strength of family feeling. To their land, to the houses where they were born, to their children, and to their relatives the Chinese are attached with a passion that is perhaps not to be found in any other nation. The patriarchal system constitutes what may be described as a very efficacious authoritarian regime for internal order. The family 'cells' lead an intensive and co-ordinated life. Parental authority is not disputed, the son bowing reverently before it, inspired by a natural feeling of filial piety, deepened and sustained by a tradition of a thousand years. No internal or external power has ever succeeded in shaking the structure of this happy and vital principle. It was against this principle that the dauntless Communist propaganda flung itself.

Being Chinese themselves, the Communists recognized that they were faced by an obstacle of the consistency of granite.

'Our society is a society of deceived, misguided people. They fill our hearts with pity. These principles rooted in the souls of our people force them to lead a miserable life, and it is our duty to give liberty to the people.'

Grave and sacrosanct words! Hearing them repeated with mystic unction and cheap pity, one felt a deep sadness, which made one say:

'These men are fanatics or only Communism can find a formula to cure the ills of society.'

The Chinese are not a philosophical people, if by philosophy one means understanding, deep thought and the discussion of abstract principles. But they have and they live by a practical philosophy, which makes them say, when faced with an exhibitionism that they distrust:

'Tsui t'ien hsin k'u.' ('The words are sweet, but the heart is bitter.') Denied the possibility of resistance, groaning under this new yoke,

they find this criticism of the Communists a comfort, a magic spell that one day will bring them the freedom they long for. Poor people!

'When a zone is liberated by our forces, our soldiers must be very careful to treat the people well.'

This is an order that must be strictly obeyed by all the *Kung-tso-yuan*, and among them the mandarins are included to a certain extent. The people must be given the impression that nothing has changed.

'We are the liberators. All classes must enjoy liberty.'

The Communists are experts at making this pinchbeck shine like gold, so many fall into their net. The ancient hatreds, the longing for revenge, which are so strong in the Chinese people, are kept alive. Accusations increase from day to day until they find an outlet in the terrible People's Courts, which have become famous for their wickedness and immorality.

What had remained relatively intact was, as I have said, the structure of the family. The criminal cleverness of the Communists was directed to undermining this, and one can distinguish three stages in the campaign of disintegration.

The first is the period of 'the treacherous caress,' as the Chinese say. Let us see what happens during this stage and how the caress is given.

The third happiness for the Chinese, as everybody knows, is to have a great many children, but it is difficult to combine this happiness with the second, which is to be rich, so that many large families live in pitiable misery. The Communists find this fact a most valuable weapon and, regardless of all human affections, they know how to profit by it.

After the confusion of the military occupation, the *Kung-tso-yuan* gets into touch with every family, takes an interest in their condition, asks questions, promises, pities. Following this first contact, which is apparently only a polite visit, there comes a second, during which it is simply and sometimes jokingly explained who the Communists are, what they are doing and what they are going to do. At the end of the lecture, and as a reward to the family, who have listened with amazement and stupefaction ('but the Communists aren't as bad as we thought!') the *Kung-tso-yuan* invites the head of the family to ask for something: some help, some millet, a little land.

'Old brother, you have so many children and very little land. Don't hesitate to ask. I'll come to-morrow for your answer.'

And the *Kung-tso-yuan* goes away sure of his prey. Who could miss

such a chance? To have some good millet—or some corn—so cheaply and offered so kindly.

‘These really are good fellows. To-morrow . . .’

To-morrow comes. The *Kung-tso-yuan* appears and finds himself among friends.

‘Well, what can I bring you?’

‘Some millet.’

‘How much do you want?’

‘Bring us two measures.’

‘Only two? Ask for more.’

‘Three.’

‘More.’

The last remnants of doubt disappear before this persistent pressure. The *Kung-tso-yuan* knows how to profit by these moments and settles on ten measures. Towards evening, the family has the promised amount.

But what makes a great impression is that the *Kung-tso-yuan* does not appear again for at least a month, so as to seem not to want to be bothered with useless expressions of gratitude. His return is hailed by the family as the appearance of a saviour. He jokes pleasantly and prepares the ground for the blow.

‘Well, what do you think of things? Are you happy?’ And here is the poisonous sting, ‘Do you want to show your gratitude to the Communists for their generosity?’

Chinese politeness exhausts itself.

Words are beautiful, but useless. Communists are not content with them.

‘Think it over,’ says the *Kung-tso-yuan*, ‘and give me your answer in a week.’

The hunter goes away and leaves his victims to consider the matter. They will never escape from the net.

The present must be paid for. That is clear, but how? In those two or three weeks of anxious thought, the poor family suspects that all is not well, that things have changed. The millet seems to weigh heavily on their stomachs. At last the end comes:

‘Well, have you thought things over?’

‘Er—yes—we do not know how to thank you. Shall we have to give back double?’

The words show their anxiety.

‘I know that you are ignorant people, so I am going to help you.’

The Communist drops the mask, and the initial friendliness disappears for ever.

'Call all your sons.'

The family feels terrified, bound hand and foot by this tyrant.

'You are not able to teach your sons, so we will take care of them.'

Even if they are poor, the Chinese people are far too intelligent not to understand the meaning of this ruthless attack. The father's protests, the distress of the mother who sees her sons snatched from her for ever, are of no avail.

The Communists need virgin soil, so the choice falls on the youngest—babies under four. From among these innocents, torn from their parents and their homes, educated in crime and immorality, will come the future leaders of the Party.

The families who barter their sons for a little millet or corn are called *Mofan-chia*,<sup>1</sup> and are given what they want. But if on one hand they are favoured by their new masters, on the other hand they are avoided and despised by the rest of the people, who hate them and describe them with three ideographs. These refer to the *Mofan-chia* by such a rude nickname that it must be left unrecorded.

Naturally, these *Mofan-chia*, notwithstanding all the good things they have received, feel sooner or later the bitterness of the contempt and the ostracism of their relatives, and repay it with equal hatred and contempt. This state of affairs is prepared and desired by the Communists, and the fury shown in the inevitable quarrel is astonishing. In China, as in all eastern countries, the feud is a cherished and inalienable prerogative. If to this pathological desire for revenge there is added the loathing, the impulse to put an end to an unbearable situation, it is possible to imagine the lengths to which the People's Courts are carried. But I shall speak of this later.

The *Kung-tso-yuan* surpass themselves in the pressure they bring to bear on the unfortunate victim, for they know how useful is a state of exasperation and suffering. The commissar returns to condole with the family he has deceived. With a smile (Oh, that fiendish smile!) he plays on the misery of the poor mother. If previously his visits were few, affectionate and short, now they are frequent, painful and interminable. One horrible day, the injured family can bear it no longer and, with an outburst of righteous indignation, the woman attacks and curses, as only a Chinese woman can, the *Kung-tso-yuan* and the

<sup>1</sup> Model families.

Communists. The *Kung-tso-yuan* is not upset. He says one sentence, a sentence like a bell tolling for the dead.

'Ni yu shen-ma i-ssü?' ('What do you mean?')

A fatal sentence, it is recited again at the opening of the People's Court, being followed by interrogations, cross examination, the most horrible tortures. The family is virtually wiped out—unless all its members surrender unconditionally to the Communists. Then everything is forgiven, but not forgotten.

There are many consequences: to the hatreds and suspicions are added a panic terror, a sense of distrust in the future, in the next developments of this Communist campaign. Many leave their land and their homes, and the lucky ones manage to find safety and happiness in non-Communist areas; many are ruined materially and morally, caught in a vice from which they cannot free themselves; many commit suicide; some deceive themselves with the hope that the situation will improve and try to compromise with Communism, despite their hatred of it.

The Communists, knowing all this, hasten to repair the damage that has been done. Those caught escaping are taken back to their houses and are not punished, much to everyone's surprise. The *Kung-tso-yuan* who played such a vital part in the beginning vanishes from the scene. Visits to families are given up, and there follows a static period—the interlude between the first and second stages.

The second stage is known as 'education,' but its objective is just the same as before. The new *Kung-tso-yuan* has the task of teaching the people about the 'new and civilized Communist way of life.'

Starting with the theory that the 'people are an ignorant mass,' it is clear that 'they must be brought to understand the noble gifts of their own characters.' It is a detailed and simple propaganda by clever specialists—a propaganda that, generally speaking, is not carried on in the schools, for the masters in the rural schools represent the backward elements, 'still imbued with old theories opposed to the new order.' This, however, has not prevented the Communists from appointing here and there, in the most important places, school-masters to do the work.

Let us see what happens.

The *Kung-tso-yuan* and his helpers are most polite. They beat a gong, collect the people and start the lesson. Though the basic method is force, sometimes they succeed by pouring ridicule on old traditions

and on the structure of the family. Chinese custom lays down that the husband and wife do not address each other by name. On leaving the house to go to market or to visit relatives, the wife walks in front of the husband with about five or six paces between them, and if they meet anyone on the way, they must immediately stop talking. While they are engaged, a young man is never allowed to be with his fiancée. The status of women in China is not the status enjoyed by women in western countries—an obvious weakness of which Communism takes every advantage.

It is not my intention to criticize these customs so different from ours. Just because they are different, and therefore very often not understood, the western world regards them with surprise and even with contempt. If it knew the Chinese people better, it would discover many things to admire in them.

At the 'instruction' meetings, these traditions are examined closely and sometimes amusingly, but the humour almost always ends by being suggestive and coarse. The *Kung-tso-yuan* speaks most entertainingly, and everyone has to applaud, even if the old people shudder with disgust and protest among themselves at such wickedness. The *Kung-tso-yuan* is very careful to introduce moral observations, for he has to gain the sympathy of his audience; the rest will come in time. The young people are very much impressed and applaud enthusiastically. Nothing gives them any forewarning of the dangers of the future, and they regard the meetings only as an easy way of amusing themselves. The master finds his friends and unwilling collaborators among them.

In subsequent lessons the *Kung-tso-yuan* passes cleverly from the amusing to the serious, until the audience is ready for the climax. One fine day it hears the 'strange teacher' say:

'Parents have no rights over their children. Children owe their parents only the respect that is felt for some tool, which was once useful, but is no longer so. Obedience to parents is against the laws of nature.'

Then, turning to the young, he launches his proclamation:

'If your parents have not done their duty to you, or if you have suffered injustices, you can—you ought—to react.'

The curtain rises on the tragedy. Although perhaps some of the audience have more or less just grievances against their parents or near relatives, respect and filial piety still conquer the desire to revenge themselves by unjust and perhaps criminal methods. The silence of

the crowd is eloquent, their faces showing that they realize they are caught in the toils.

'You have lived like so many fools,' goes on the *Kung-tso-yuan*, 'but the hour has come when we will do justice. . . . Speak.'

The people are silent.

'So your parents are all Confucius—saints.'

He begins to lose his temper, his insistence becoming evil, subtle. What do the natural feelings of his listeners matter?

'Speak!'

The silence becomes more and more oppressive. Remembrance of the past treachery of these implacable torturers seems to be accompanied by brutal laughter. React, yes, if they could take him and throw him into a well. But later? Revenge—Communist revenge. Silence is the best weapon at the moment.

But the *Kung-tso-yuan* is in possession of a far stronger weapon: he can force the people to stay there for the whole day, and if necessary for the night, and another day. Finally, some unnatural son, crushing down every instinct of filial piety and self-respect, spurred on by the hope that he will finally get his rights, accuses his father and mother. The words, which sound like the blows of a hammer, pass like the blade of a knife over the faces of the bystanders. There are shouts, curses. The mocking, cruel *Kung-tso-yuan* listens to the general protest without speaking, noting the loudest demonstrators. The unfortunate accuser wants to withdraw, to deny what he has said, but it is too late.

A special People's Court is held immediately, to try and to punish the parents, and also the noisiest demonstrators. The cruelties practised are incredible. I shall describe only the end. The accuser is compelled to torture his mother and father to death, paying for his rashness in this way. A gloomy curtain of sadness falls over the scene. What more is there to say when not only the mass of the people, but also the intimate friends of the victims are forced to applaud such barbarous acts?

The sentence I have already quoted, 'Remember us, Father, who live with a rope round our necks,' becomes even more poignant.

The horror of the scene, and the memory of the son who accused his parents, are now linked in people's memories with the figure of the representative of those infamous beings, the *Kung-tso-yuan*. No one dares to speak of what occurred, even friendship giving no sense of security. It might happen—indeed, has happened—that a fellow

villager, or a friend, is or will become a spy. Only people tired of life mention the incident; all read in each others' faces what they feel and repeat the words, as if they were the climax of some mysterious and eloquent speech, 'Fan la t'ien ti la.' ('Heaven and earth are upside down.')

An unspeakable terror sweeps over the villages and the countryside; a careless word to their children may bring disaster and death. One sees the people getting thin and wasted and creeping about. They go with timid and faltering steps to the markets, their way bedewed with their tears. What a contrast between the defiant, strident happiness of the Communists and the misery of the people! I have seen the poor mountain folk going from one shop to another with folded sacks under their arms, looking with sunken eyes at people and houses that, perhaps unconsciously, they passionately hate. Their brief absence from their families frightens them. They turn suddenly, leaving this exciting and dangerous bustle, fear of some new peril driving them back to their mountains.

As we have seen, filial respect and love are very strong emotions and these neutralize the power of the *Kung-tso-yuan*. After his experiences and the consequences of the first Court he withdraws into the background and there are no more accusations, but he goes on with his work; he must do his 'duty' at all cost. He separates the old and the husbands and wives from the young people, compelling the first to stand in a corner of the square and meditate, examining their own lives in complete silence. Fortunately, these vulgar puppet-shows are not ordered every day.

Meanwhile the young are being educated. What they are taught and what is explained to them is too disgusting to be described, and the young of both sexes do not listen with the enthusiasm and enjoyment of the first days, but it must be admitted that Communism has had some success in this field. The fruits will ripen in time—and in what proportions?

These things give food for thought, but they are not all. There are other treacheries demanding justice, not to say revenge, which appear during the third stage.

The *Kung-tso-yuan*, finding himself frustrated by obstinate and almost mass resistance, more or less ashamed of his shameful conduct, retires as usual for a few days. A report on his activities must be made to a pitiless and cruel judge. Very often he is flogged for his lack of zeal and, what is worse, shut up in a room for months to meditate

on his sin and on his ignorance of Communist principles. But I will speak of that elsewhere.

After a few days respite, the same *Kung-tso-yuan*, or another even worse, appears, filling the people with alarm as to what is in store. ‘*T’i-kaō erh-t’ung*<sup>1</sup>’ is the text of the next Communist sermon—a sacred principle, but, as the means and the object of this promotion are the work of devils, the principle changes its nature and becomes infamous.

During this third stage, attention is concentrated not on adults, but on the boys: ‘Woe to anyone who lays hands on a little boy! Woe to anyone who tries to stifle the gifts a boy has received from nature!’ The gifts, of course, are not filial love and obedience, but those that clash with such virtues. ‘The boy must enjoy the same rights as an adult—even that of beating his own parents. The boy may therefore commit any crime. These principles are preached and explained with the usual persistence.

Naturally such freedom is not given to small boys so that they may be ruined by vice, while love of parents is instinctive. And if, as is natural, the boy resents having been punished, the fact that he has made his father and mother so unhappy creates in the little mind an association of ideas, so that it is difficult for him to commit the same fault again. Everyone learns by experience.

Usually all parents think well of their children, but in Communist China, in addition to the many other grave apprehensions of these poor people, they find themselves compelled to compromise with their own children as they would with the brigands. The parents do everything to please the boys, giving them complete liberty, never asking them to do the smallest thing that would teach the boys self-control and train them for future responsibilities. And the parents must behave in such a way that they never hear the most horrible of threats from those childish mouths: ‘I’m going to tell the *Kung-tso-yuan*!’ It is terrifying.

In order to destroy the resistance created by the boys’ affection for their parents, it is necessary to employ clever and conscienceless teachers. Among the tactics evolved by the Communists is one that I have already mentioned, the *Erh T’ung Chün*—the boys’ organization. Its object is to accustom the boys to the use of power. As, however, its effects are not sufficiently radical and rather slow in producing results, the *Kung-tso-yuan* proceeds along different lines with a certain

<sup>1</sup> Promoting the status of children.

amount of independence, obtaining quicker returns and more obvious successes.

The *Erh T'ung Chün*, as has been said, is responsible for the surveillance of the villages, the roads, and the travellers. One sees the little policemen at the entrances to the villages, at the cross-roads, intent on their dual occupations of watching and playing games. The *Kung-tso-yuan*, a well-known figure, is looked on by them as a friend and master. He is interested in their work, but still more in their games. When the boys, forgetting surveillance and Communism, and full of excitement, tell him all about their games, the traitor, with the cunning of an able criminal and a smile whose falseness escapes their innocent eyes, lets drop at the end of the story a sentence that increases the careless loquacity of the boys.

'Who knows how many times you have driven your parents distracted with your games?'

And the little boys chatter in their shrill voices:

'Oh, yes, we've often driven them mad!'

The *Kung-tso-yuan* laughs and continues his probing.

'And you've undoubtedly caused quarrels between your parents?'

'Yes!'

'Naughty boys!'

These words, said with a suspicious solicitude, awaken in some boy's mind a confused memory that he links with recent crimes. In his young imagination, he sees a true picture of his treacherous friend. He finds himself trembling with fear, gets up and goes away. The *Kung-tso-yuan* makes a mental note, but says nothing. The boys' confessions become valuable evidence, but the Commissar wants to discover something more concrete, something that will provide a pretext for a People's Court.

In all families in the world there are misunderstandings, squabbles caused by the impatience of the husband or the carelessness of the wife; small affairs easily put right in the family circle. This is a subject on which the Communists lay great stress and try to make the boys provide information.

There is another thing: in the Communist zones it is difficult to discover quarrels on a grand scale, the people holding peace and life too dear—the life of their own family. All try to avoid quarrels, or settle them in secret, and there are many happenings concealed even from the closest relatives. Certainly, under their new lords and masters, so far as outward manifestations are concerned, they lead the lives of

Benedictines. Hatred, the desire for revenge, irritation—all must be suppressed owing to the needs of the new situation, but one day the most intimate secrets become public property thanks to the work of the *Kung-tso-yuan*.

Let us study his tactics. At the critical moment—that is to say, when he wants to get the boys to talk—he becomes most affectionate, giving them sweets and caresses.

‘It was your fault that your father and mother quarrelled!’ he laughs.

‘Yes, but very often it is not my fault.’

‘No, no. Mummy and daddy are good and it is you who make them lose patience.’

The snake’s eyes become brighter and his expression changes. A last scratch and the boy speaks hurriedly.

‘How can they quarrel,’ asks the snake, ‘if nobody makes them cross?’

‘When daddy gets back late and the millet is cold, he is furious and shouts at mummy. It is not my fault that the millet is cold.’

And so, while defending himself, the boy betrays his parents without realizing what he is doing.

The *Kung-tso-yuan* becomes serious and asks the boy his father’s name.

‘Good. Go on watching and be clever.’

He gets up, goes to the village, calls the head, and demands a People’s Court.

‘Among you there are those who treat their children badly. Among you there are those who hate each other. They must not be concealed. Have them out and make them confess.’

For the hundredth time the people are terrified. Who are these new criminals? As usual the Court drags on for hours and days until the *Kung-tso-yuan* announces the name of the family. There are shouts, cries, curses. The woman, overcome by a sudden brutal rage at seeing herself betrayed by her son, seizes the boy, biting and scratching her own flesh and blood.

‘What does it matter to us if all the people in China are beaten to the earth so that Communism triumphs!’

Poor people!

## CHAPTER

# II

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*24th October 1945*

RETURNING from Changte a few days before, the servant had brought a letter for a Tienchiaching family. It had been given to him by a Christian and the Judas took it to the head of the Peasants' Association. The Commissar was there and opened the letter. Fortunately there was no criticism of Communism in it, merely family news and an invitation to one of the daughters to go to Changte. The girl and her sister were arrested at once and their house was watched.

'You are two contemptible creatures,' said the Commissar. 'How was this letter brought? Why have you these contacts with the enemy?'

On the 23rd October, the letter and the girls were taken before the head of the zone. The Communists had discovered that we were responsible for the arrival of the letter, so we too were implicated. A Christian came to tell us that the letter had been sent to the mandarin, and that the girls had been beaten and ill-treated. The greatest hatred, however, was reserved for us.

'Now,' they said, 'we have documents to prove that these foreigners are traitors.'

They were demanding that the mandarin should condemn us to suffer the death of traitors—that is, to be roasted alive.

We sent back instructions that no Christians were to come and see us. In order to maintain the necessary contact, and in case there was any news, we arranged to meet outside the village at the cross-roads on the way to Hochien.

*25th October*

I never went so willingly to visit my patients; it was a means of finding out if there was any news about the letter. I saw the head of

the chamber of commerce, who asked me a great deal about confession and the power of the priest to absolve people from their sins.

'If a man commits a sin,' he enquired, 'for example, if he steals documents, communicates with the enemy—can he be forgiven?'

'Yes, if he sincerely repents and atones for the evil he has done.'

He laughed and went on: 'And what is thought of the State that lays down laws for the punishment of such crimes?'

'The Church is concerned not so much with the actual fact as with the moral rehabilitation of the guilty man. She is concerned with the life of the soul, which is the noblest and immortal part of the man, and leaves human laws to function according to their nature.'

There followed an interminable discussion on the existence and nature of the soul. But that phrase, 'communicates with the enemy,' was only too clearly an allusion. I could not question him, as we three priests have agreed to deny all knowledge of the existence of the letter.

Coming back, I met the judge. To tell the truth, I was afraid of that man just in the same way as the villagers were afraid of him. When they met him, they instinctively began to arrange their clothes, to pass their hand between their noses and mouths, to feel themselves all over, as if to ascertain whether they were tidy, or in order to hide some forbidden object. They would make a deep bow, and say some words of greeting. Some, meeting him unexpectedly and not knowing what to do, used to climb up the terraces beside the road, or jump into a field.

When he met men carrying vegetables, fruit or firewood, the judge would ask the prices and where their loads came from. These men, dripping with perspiration, their foreheads, burnt by the sun and furrowed by the wind, seeming to sweat blood, would try to smile, but their answers sounded like sobs. The situation was worse when they could not understand the questions. Only some old men who, owing to age and experience, had lost the natural sense of shame—and, one might add, of fear—dared to approach him. Very different was the people's greeting when they met a missionary.

*26th October*

A hope of freedom opened up such vistas that we were in the greatest excitement. I was astonished at feeling like myself again, a sensation I had not known since the day we were recaptured. Life and hope were reborn, and our minds began to work, to make plans, to think of the future. I felt as if I had already left that abominable place. What

miracles imagination can work for desperate men! Our excitement reached such a pitch that we could have embraced all the Communists!

The herald of this hope was the Christian, Ma Shan, and the worker of the miracle of our escape was to be none other than a brigand we used to know and who had joined the Communists. He was astonished to hear from the Christians that we were prisoners, and, as an old friend, was ready to undertake to arrange for our return to Suiyeh. There was, however, a condition—that we should collaborate with the Communists. If we regarded this as impossible, the Christians at Suiyeh were already planning another means of obtaining our freedom; they were writing a letter, signed by all the heads of families, to the central Communist government, begging for our release.

Our hopes were centred on the brigand's intervention, but that phrase, 'collaboration with the Communists,' raised many doubts and we were not agreed on the subject. I thought that we should reply that we were ready to consider collaboration as far as we could, but we would first like to know what this would involve. We decided to send a reply asking for this information. Ma Shan went away promising to return with the answer as soon as possible.

If only it were possible to say good-bye to the judge, to the mandarin, to that chaotic Communist world that was poisoning our blood!

*27th October*

The hope of freedom had upset me completely. I spent the whole night walking up and down in the courtyard. That letter asking for an explanation about collaboration, had it been offensive? Perhaps it would have been better to say that we accepted? Once at Suiyeh, would it be easy to escape to Changte? I considered the people involved and all the complications—the brigand, the Christians, the letter to the government. . . . But I reached no satisfactory decision. There was an idea, a thought, something better lurking at the back of my mind, but it eluded me. The mental effort spurred me on till finally, like a sudden flash of lightning on a dark night, it came into my mind: ESCAPE. The shock was so great that instinctively I turned round as if someone had discovered me committing a crime. We had to try to escape again; there was no other hope of safety.

The light came and the dawn was extraordinarily beautiful. A bird of prey, caught by the returning day, flew away to a crevasse in the mountain. I too retired, worn out by my perambulations.

About nine o'clock an old Christian, slipping through the watch kept on the gate, came to see us. He told us that the two girls had been taken yesterday to the provincial prison. The investigation about the letter was going on, all the Christians being implicated. The judge had sent a message to the head of the village to say that no one was to come here if he valued his life.

We asked what was being said about us, but the Christian did not want to tell us, so as not to make us unhappy. We were regarded as being responsible, and he advised us to be very careful of what we said, and always to deny that the letter had passed through our hands. He also told us that, in case of danger, all the young men of the village were ready to come by night to fetch us and take us away. They had already decided on the least perilous paths, places to hide in along the road, and where we could conceal ourselves as soon as we were in the country. In the event of a crisis, there was a path running along the crest of the mountain. The old man pointed it out to us.

'Nobody knows it,' he said, 'so it is safe, even during the day. When you leave here, take the road up the mountain, half-way up leave the road, and bear towards that clump of firs which you see to the left of the mountain. Then, still keeping left, follow the crevasse and you will come to the path. I will try to go up there every day, so that I can act as a guide.'

We complained of the Judas who had betrayed us.

'His idea,' replied the old man, 'was to ingratiate himself with the Communists, and perhaps to get some money. In addition, he is on bad terms with the girls' family, and you know that in China revenge is the last sin to be cured. When there is also a desire for money . . .'

He left us, telling us to take heart. It was the hour when the rations were distributed and all the sentries were absent, so it was a good moment for him to go away. The poor old man, trembling and leaning on his stick, hobbled off slowly to the fields. We watched him disappear among the rows of persimmons. God bless him.

This news threw us for the thousandth time into a sea of uncertainty.

*28th October*

The head of the chamber of commerce was still suffering from malaria. My daily visits to him were a mercy at that time. I met many Communist chiefs along the road and they greeted me respectfully, which was a comfort to me. It seemed as if the affair of the letter would

do no more than create a certain amount of fear. I gathered during my visit to the head of the chamber of commerce that things were not as serious as we had thought them. He talked to me as usual about the hospital, the medicines and the patients.

After dinner, I was sent for by the Minister of the Theatre, as his wife was seriously ill. I started at once.

It was a typical autumn day; the mountains were covered with heavy clouds, and there was very little water in the river, which wandered sadly over pebbles of different colours. A little mist rose from it, the last emanation of that terrible but beneficent force of nature. In a few days, the ice would bring it the motionless peace of winter. I crossed the river. The path wound up from one terrace to another towards the open country. The mountain, the valley and the plain below were all grey, the ploughed fields shining between the irregular strips of castor-oil plants and sorghum. The trees were losing their last yellow leaves, a reminder of the season that was already over. The eye dwelt sadly on this inexorable sunset of the year, which showed the first signs of a winter that threatened to be severe.

I reached the country, wandered along some lanes more like the dried beds of streams than roads, and arrived at my destination. A young woman was lying on a wooden bed in great pain. There were frescoes on the walls; books, drawings, colours and brushes on the table; and unfinished paintings on the floor. Her husband was seated by a small window, playing a violin quite happily. He got up, came to meet me and welcomed me in perfect English. I examined the invalid and gave her some medicine.

I said good-bye and prepared to leave, but the man stopped me and, with the pretence of wanting to talk to me, asked me if I had been in Shanghai, if I knew the Fathers in the French school, and if I could say Mass. I enquired smiling:

'Do you know what Mass is?'

He bent his head and replied:

'Yes, I am a Christian, and so is she.'

He had left home at eighteen to become a Communist; had fought against the Japanese and been wounded several times, as a reward for which services he had been made Minister of the Theatre. I asked him some questions and exhorted him to lead a good life. My God, he had lost even the remembrance of what is ordinary decent conduct. I did my best to recall him to the right way, but it was useless.

Here was another person of whom I had always thought with

terror, the leader of a group of men whose task it was to destroy the conscience of the people by means of the stage. I thought of the last actions of this shameless man. In the town of Linhsien, two girls of a well-to-do family had been saved from execution so that they might act in scandalous plays purporting to portray the life of the rich.

'Vice displayed in its crude reality produces the most certain results. For such plays to be a success, we need the most competent people—and who can be so competent as the rich themselves?'

I had thought, I repeat, with terror of this man, and now that I saw him, he appeared a contemptible creature. I was sorry for him. I tried again, but it was useless; he smiled at me with the smile of a lost soul. I turned to the woman (she was his seventh wife) and said:

'And if God were to strike, should you not be better prepared?'

'No, because I must go on living. If I could pray, I should ask God to open your mind, so that you could understand that the truth is only to be found in Communism. It makes me suffer so much when I see that you good, intelligent, well-educated priests have not yet been able to see the light.'

I showed my disapproval and my sorrow and left them saying:

'May God have mercy on you.'

*29th October*

Among all the patients I treated in the village, the one who awakened my pity and made me happy was a little girl belonging to what had been perhaps the most prosperous family. She was dragging an enormously swollen foot, but she did not want me to treat it. The greatest efforts had to be made to induce her to come to see me. She was accompanied by her grandmother and three aunts. They went to *La Moresina* (as did all the other women who came to be treated), who was very pleased to perform the introductions, especially as, on this occasion, they were her relatives. I made the little girl sit on a stone table in the courtyard and unbound the swollen leg up to the knee.

'I must open it,' I said.

At my words she raised an outcry, struggled, screamed. The three aunts, the grandmother and *La Moresina* all remonstrated.

'Grandmother, first aunt, second aunt, third aunt, save me! Oh, the pain!'

When she saw that things were getting serious, her shrieks grew louder. With the help of Father Monti, I succeeded in making a deep

incision, while the courtyard filled with curious people. Even the judge hurried in.

'I thought some people were being killed,' he said to me.

It was necessary to force the pus out of the wound. 'No, no!' said the patient, seizing her foot with one hand and my hand with the other. 'I can do that myself. Go away, everybody.'

I let her try, but naturally her hand approached the wound as if it were a brazier. Her aunt, who was laughing, made a movement towards her, but the child pushed her away, laughing and crying at the same time. I begged her to let me do it. My words, but even more the shame of finding herself stared at by so many curious people, had the desired effect. It was a most amusing scene. I dealt with the wound and, descending from the 'operating table,' she covered her head with a towel and, supported by her aunts, who could not stop laughing, she went away, humiliated and sobbing.

'Come back to-morrow after dinner,' I said.

'I shall never come again,' she replied angrily.

*30th October*

The judge had left for a great Communist conference at Linchi. He was to be away for ten days, so we looked forward to a little peace.

I visited the head of the chamber of commerce and found the most surprising news in the paper. The mandarins of Shansi province had laid down in general assembly that there was to be 'absolute liberty for the Catholic Church.' I jumped to my feet, waved the paper and cried:

'Long live the Catholic Church!'

The clerks looked at me with astonishment, and there were significant gestures among those who knew the real state of affairs. Their chief smiled good-naturedly and said to me:

'Very soon we too shall have a conference about religion.'

I sat down again and went on reading the paper. Unfortunately, every paragraph ended with such ominous words as, 'under the control of the local authorities,' 'according to usage and custom,' 'so long as it is not contrary to the will of the people,' etc. The paper then went on to talk of the sufferings of the church at Luan during the Japanese occupation, describing how nuns had been violated and priests killed—but none of this was true. The article ended with praise of Communism, which had given complete liberty to the Church and to Christians. This was the 'liberty': at Luan there were



vi *Refuge for the Aged*



*And for the Little Ones*



VII. Mission Buildings at Hsiaochuang: now totally destroyed



Entrance to the Mission at Weihui

Chinese priests. Every time they went out, they were followed by a Communist who told them what they were to do and what they were to preach. If, for example, there was any official work in the localities they visited, even that of mounting sentries, the priests were obliged to do their share, all of which entirely prevented the propagation of the Faith.

On my way home, I met three Christians who were returning from the prison, where they had taken blankets to the two poor girls, who, awaiting trial, were crying day and night. I asked for news of things in Tienchiaching. The Commissar was still furious; there were meetings, harangues, threats. The affair of the letter had become involved with the bell of the Shrine of the Madonna, which the Communists were determined to have. They had already tried to take it down, but the man who had climbed up to it had fallen and been killed. This had caused a panic and no one had dared to try again.

'The bell must be taken down!' cried the Commissar. 'Everything must be destroyed!'

The Christians agreed with him, but nobody obeyed.

*31st October*

The respect and admiration felt by the Communists for America, 'who has won the war,' had now turned to hate. The American representative in China, who was trying to make peace between the parties, seemed to be anti-Communist, and conferences had been going on for a month without success. Some people declared that Mao Tse-tung had been killed or imprisoned, others that he had returned, others that the American representative would be changed. It was quite certain that the Communist government had given orders for hatred of America to be fermented among the people.

This had already been done; in several meetings for *tou-cheng*,<sup>1</sup> dummies had been carried among the audience, who had been compelled to shout curses and 'Down with America! Death to the Americans! Death to the fat bourgeois foreigners who want to strangle us!' These meetings finished by stoning and trampling on the dummies representing America. In one village a boy was killed by a stone that missed its target.

'Let the Americans come with their atomic bombs!' shouted the

<sup>1</sup> 'To provoke and contend with'; a key-word in the Communist vocabulary, used of the people's 'right' or 'necessity to struggle with' and so overcome its adversaries.

Commissars. ‘We shall know how to defy all the American atomic bombs!'

Sometimes they combined one of these meetings with a People’s Court. Instead of dummies there were human beings. More than one was brutally killed in this way.

Poor unfortunate China! If America were but to use her might! Everybody looked forward to such a day and yearned for a foreign Power, so long as it was not Communist, to put an end to a disastrous state of affairs that worsened every day.

### *1st November. All Saints’ Day*

A day of homesickness—homesickness for the Heavenly Country, perhaps not very far distant.

‘The thought of the happiness awaiting us there,’ I wrote, ‘swallows up the sufferings of our long imprisonment. The prospect of death loses its horror, and I think of it as it is presented to us in the Liturgy, in its real significance. It is the “transitus” from this unhappy life to our real life. What are our little sufferings compared to the sufferings of the martyrs, the saints and the holy souls who, after having overcome the temptations and trials of the present life, have won crowns? What if a crown be reserved for me, notwithstanding my selfishness, my animosities, my unwillingness to bear my cross? Holy thoughts of this holy day. A sweetness such as I have never known fills my soul.

“A little while and ye shall see me, and where I am there will ye be also. No one can rob you of that joy.”

‘The whole being is silent. There are moments during which tears are the only means of expression. To cry for joy! God’s promises are not a man’s promises.

‘To-day no visits, no walks. I remain alone with my happiness. Evening falls and the thought of that crown gives me a peace that the world cannot give or know. Our life is for that Country where the selfishness and wickedness of the world and its inhabitants can never reach us.’

### *2nd November. All Souls’ Day*

‘The dead,’ I wrote, ‘are prisoners like us; like us they suffer and long for liberty; like us they feel the absence of loved ones; but unlike us they are not useless to themselves and others. God’s justice, in its infinite goodness, has decreed that, while they can do nothing for themselves, they are almost omnipotent for others. They are noble

prisoners who await the mercy of the King, free, therefore, from the vulgar contempt that is the shameful lot of the victims of human laws. To-day the memory of the dead is not a temporary and hopeless memory of people one will never see again. "Yet a little while." They pity us because they are unhappy, and they pity us with that compassion each feels for himself. They commiserate with us because, like us, they too were sinners; they, like us, have felt the bitterness and the hatred of sin.'

After dinner I went out and, seated under a centuries-old tree within sight of the cemetery at Tienchiaching, I said my beads.

Our needs were great and pressing as were those of the beloved dead. The beads passed through my fingers and I named with tenderness all the dear ones who had gone from this world: my mother . . . my father. . . . The day would come when, freed from the bonds of this life, we would meet in the Heavenly Country, to be for ever with the Great King.

*3rd November*

But in this life, one is rarely on Mount Tabor, and only for a short time. Worries began again. In the morning, notwithstanding orders to the contrary, four or five Christians from Tienchiaching tried to see us, but they were stopped. One, however, succeeded in getting through the second door without being detected, and reached us. I went out in the vain hope of being able to do something for the others, but I did not see anyone; no doubt they had been seized. I came back feeling very anxious.

The Christian who had managed to get in told us once again not to be afraid. Speaking for everyone, he repeated the assurance that, in the event of an emergency, the young men would mobilize to save us. He said, too, that the Nationalists were approaching from the south and had already reached the mountains to the west; the commissar had left Tienchiaching, giving orders that the bell was to be got down at all cost, and uttering threats about the letter affair.

When this Christian was leaving, one of the others who had been stopped appeared. The sentry had taken them to the judge's secretary, who knowing how matters stood, had advised them to go home again. We said that we would be at the usual cross-roads the next day.

After dinner, a soldier, who had been most insolent to us in the first days of our imprisonment, returned. He had been very ill during

the last months and, though he was shaking, he wanted to ask questions. I recommended him not to talk too much and to stay in bed if he wanted to get well.

'I am cured,' he said to me, 'and I do not want to lose my strength again by going back to bed. We are not like you who are afraid of a fly and, when you have a little pain in your stomach, ask to be set free and, when this is refused, throw yourself on your bed and pretend to be ill!'

This was directed at me, a revenge for not giving him medicine I did not possess. I was silent and hoped that exhaustion would force him to stop, but he would not give in, and after making a tour of our 'kingdom,' touching books and throwing blankets on the floor, sat down on the doorstep so that it was impossible to pass without knocking into him. The servant, wanting to come in, politely asked permission, but the brute did not move. The servant, edging by, just touched him and there was an immediate outburst of curses. My patience was exhausted. Putting down my pencil, I got up.

'You Communist villain, is this the teaching that they give you?'

Saying this I kicked him down the steps, adding:

'When you come to the judge's house, we shall see each other again!'

And I shut the door.

Soon he returned with two or three other soldiers. They hammered on the door and when I opened it I saw that one of them was a man attached to the head of the chamber of commerce. I was still angry and told him what had happened. Knowing that I was a friend of his chief, he turned on the scoundrel and, after cursing him, wound up:

'Get out of here and never put your foot inside again!'

I could have kissed him! He asked me to go to the head of the chamber of commerce and I started at once.

#### *4th November*

A family feast-day—S. Carlo, my patron saint. There were special observances: at Mass two lights instead of one; incense instead of the sour smell of nut oil. At breakfast there was a little more millet and the kind good wishes of my two companions. Our happiness was simple and heartfelt, but very quickly destroyed by a soldier sent, no doubt, by the scoundrel of the day before, whose loss of face must have been so unpleasant that he preferred to send a substitute.

In the afternoon Ma Shan arrived—and vanished were the rosy

hopes we had cherished. At the very moment when the plans had seemed to be going well, the Communists had discovered that the brigand was preparing to go over to the Nationalists with all his troops. They had imprisoned his family, confiscated all his possessions and transferred him elsewhere as a junior officer. We realized that he could now do nothing for us; it would be sufficiently difficult for him to save himself.

We asked Ma Shan how the Communists had found out the brigand's plans and if he had lost all credit with his Communist chiefs. As question followed question, the dream faded away, seeming like a bird without wings that, wishing to fly at all costs, falls from branch to branch and in the end sinks into a dark hole to await its last hour with terror.

Ma Shan, seeing how disappointed we were, tried to give us fresh courage by talking of the letter from the Christians to the central Communist government, but this seemed to us to be much less hopeful than the other plan had been. The hour for our liberty had not yet struck.

### *5th November*

'How difficult it is,' I wrote, 'to be of a good courage when one is anxious and filled with apprehensions about oneself! The outside world can distract one's thoughts for a time, but even this is sometimes another cause for spiritual unrest, while in addition there is the perpetual effort to take a less tragic view of Communism. I know that there is the virtue of charity, which compels me to do my duty even towards my enemies. But how can one think well of these followers of the anti-Christ, the representatives of a world that Christ condemned? But I must look on these men as my brothers, even when they persecute me and prepare to kill me. I have seen so many Communist leaders, heard them talk, heard them discuss their plans, which were by way of being good for the people. I do not know if the most saintly of the anchorites in the desert, with all their virtues, could find something of good in these discussions and actions. When, therefore, one hears their plans for the destruction of morality and the natural conception of life, one's soul rebels and one is like a child in the power of a stepmother, longing not to obey her, but doing so to avoid punishment. The greatest patience and faith in life are needed to keep up one's heart in these days of revolution.'

The reappearance of the little girl who had come a few days before

served to distract my mind from a train of thought that might have led to the blackest pessimism. After her first visit she had gone away declaring she would never return. Her aunts' remonstrances and her grandmother's threats, as well as *La Moresina*'s kindness, had prevailed on her—added to which, a recurrence of the pain in the leg had made it very hard for her to remain defiant. The bandages had not been touched! The scene of the other day repeated itself, but she did not say, 'I will never come again!'

We nicknamed her 'Ching Chiao.'<sup>1</sup>

6th November

After breakfast a soldier presented himself with his rifle on his shoulder—a thing a Chinese never does in front of a doctor. It startled me and I was still more startled when he said:

'You must go to the mandarin's prison.'

I asked for an explanation, but we could not understand each other; he was from the south and his language sounded barbarous to me.

I asked for an interpreter and my fears dissolved in laughter. The head of the prison had sent for me—that was all! I went. He was a young man of about thirty with a cadaverous face, a low forehead and long hair falling over black-rimmed eyes that burned feverishly. His half-open mouth showed that he was in great pain. He was lying on a bed and gave a faint smile when he saw me. It was obvious that he was suffering from tuberculosis; he had had a very bad haemorrhage, and the vessel was still there ready.

Having done what I could, which was very little, I went away warning his deputy that the patient was in a very serious condition. Crossing one of the courtyards, I heard my name being called. I turned and saw the faces of two women looking out through a hole in the corner. They were Christians, terrified and worn out with suffering and many tears. They stretched out their hands, begging for help. If someone had said to me, 'Throw yourself over that precipice, I would have done so willingly in order to escape from this tragic scene. I was hardly able to say:

'The Lord is near you, and perhaps you will go to Him soon  
Kneel down, so that I may give you absolution.'

I rushed away like a madman to the chief of police.

'If they were not guilty,' was the answer to all my prayers, 'they would not be there.'

<sup>1</sup> Literally, 'Gently, gently.'

I tried again, telling him that a little gratitude for what I had done for him would not be out of place.

'You have done your duty and perhaps I have shown even too much gratitude. The days are over when crimes can be discussed with friendly smiles.'

'I do not think that you have ever been my friend. I am not asking for mercy for these two women, but for your Communist justice.'

'And the person who pretends to be interested in justice is someone like yourself, who interferes in other people's affairs. Do your duty and don't interfere.'

Saying this, he accompanied me to the door. I had not time to turn round and bow to him before it was slammed. No argument was of any avail with a man like him, sick in body and soul. The only person who could have helped was an enemy; I could only pray God to have mercy on those poor women and to protect their virtue.

*7th November*

The unbridled liberty that Communism allows, and often imposes when it is a question of destruction and massacre, has brutalized many people. Spurred on by an ever-increasing desire to commit more and more horrible crimes, they profit by licensed anarchy to gratify old hates and feuds, to rob and make money. They do not understand that this liberty is a terrible temptation leading to their ruin.

When the victim is desperate it is easy to find some pretext or to invent some crime, and the accusation against someone more or less innocent is welcomed and supported by the Communist chiefs. Suddenly the tables are turned; the tyrant becomes the victim, and the victim mastered by hatred or a desire for revenge, becomes more powerful than his previous persecutor. In this way a chain of hatred is created, stretching from the highest to the lowest in this macabre and tragic scene.

Even among the Christians, sad to say, some have lost their heads and become worse devils than the pagans. To-day they killed such a one, an ex-seminarist of Tienchiaching. Having become a Communist simply from a desire for revenge, he had been made head of the village, and had governed by means of crimes and terrorism until the day of reckoning came. He was imprisoned and tried by all the Communist criminal courts. Several commissars and chiefs, criminals like himself, tried to obtain his acquittal, but the people had brought too many charges against him. The leading Communists undoubtedly

wanted to save him, for he would have been useful to them, but this time they had to make a virtue of necessity and announced, 'The Communists do not want murderers.'

The way in which he was killed was a terrible reminder to us, and another reason never to believe in the words or kindness of the Communists. Called before the Court for the last time, he was told that he had been pardoned, that he could go home and become a judge. Two armed soldiers escorted him. When he reached the river he stopped to take off his slippers and roll up his trousers. While he was doing this, a blow on the head with the butt of a rifle flung him into the river. This was the end of the man who had caused so many tears and so much blood to flow in the village and the countryside. We talked about it all day. And we? We could not expect anything better.

*8th November*

Another call to the head of the chamber of commerce. I spread out my quilt in the sun, it having become a disgusting object owing to the blood that the insects sucked from our veins every night, then set off. I stayed to dinner and, as there were only the two of us, we talked very frankly. I wanted to ask him questions about the Courts and the People's Commissars, but did not know how to get on to the subject. At a certain moment, however, almost without knowing it and feeling that it was another person speaking, I heard myself saying:

'I should, perhaps, be more sympathetic towards Communism if all the Courts and the Commissars that make life so unbearable for the people were done away with.'

'If we listened to your suggestion,' he answered, 'it would be the end of Communism. No, as I've often told you before, we are engaged in promoting world revolution. The human race, as explained to you very clearly a fortnight ago by our leader, has been mistaken, has followed the wrong road as a result of your philosophy. Unfortunately even the world that has not come into contact with that philosophy is dominated by the same principles.'

'Hence it is not true that the world has been ruined by our philosophy. To the contrary, such principles are inborn and cannot be destroyed, for they are implanted by a Supreme Being.'

'No, that is a mistaken premise. It is not a Supreme Being—or even nature—that has imposed them.'

'What, then?'

'It is simply the influence of your philosophy. We have not yet

succeeded in analysing clearly the nature of the influence, but we are sure that, once it is destroyed, the world will improve.'

'And supposing that what you say is true, which it is not, how will you destroy this influence?'

'To use as an analogy something we regard as barbarous, sometimes a schoolmaster uses a stick. When the boy makes a mistake, the master beats him, scolds him and, by these means, reduces the boy to such a state of bewilderment that he is able to absorb whatever he is being taught.'

'It seems quite the opposite to me. When I was small and the master or mistress beat me, I couldn't understand anything and I played truant.'

'Just so: we too were small and did not understand. That is the reason why we now use other methods in our schools and regard the old methods as barbarous. It is necessary to wait until a man is in full control of his faculties to be able to produce results.'

'I don't understand you.'

'Look here. In the world there are intelligent and stupid individuals. But all are mistaken and misled. That is why we must frighten them in order to teach them. So we must reduce humanity to such a state of bewilderment and terror that it no longer knows what to do. Naturally the majority succumb. On those who resist we then begin our work. That is why our commissars are cruel and the Courts create such terror.'

'Unfortunately what you say about the commissars and the Courts is true. Wickedness and brutality reach such a pitch that, when I happen to be present, I feel as if I am assisting at a scene enacted in hell. I am convinced, and nothing will dissuade me, that these commissars are devils. Communism will never succeed.'

I asked him one last question:

'And how long will it take you to reduce the world to this state?'

'Five years—ten years. It does not matter to us. What matters is that our work should go on with all its initial enthusiasm.'

I left that place feeling as if some evil surgeon had removed some essential part of my being. The smile he had given me at the end of his last words followed me as if it were some fearful guarantee that they would attain their aims. When so much of humanity—without faith, without fear in God—blindly adopts such diabolical principles, victory for Communism seemed to me inevitable.

## CHAPTER

# I2

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9th November 1945

**L**A Moresina asked me a curious question: 'Who told you that the Nationalist troops would be here in a few days?' 'Nobody has told me such a thing,' I replied.

She pointed out that two days ago, when I was dressing the leg of the little girl we had named Ching Chiao, I had said:

'How will you be able to run away when the Nationalists arrive?'

I had indeed said something like that, but simply to induce the child to let me dress her leg.

'Well,' remarked La Moresina, 'in the village they are all convinced that you know something.'

It had nothing to do with the fact that since late last night Communist troops had been marching through the village. But the popular imagination regarded it as a coincidence, and when some unfortunate fellow such as I says something that appears to have some connection with a fact, the idea is accepted as the truth and instead of being merely a simple joke, it becomes a source of astonishing news. So my name was on everybody's lips and I was looked upon as someone who had secret information. The troops were certainly there, but what had that to do with what I had said? I could have tried to clear things up, but with the Chinese the more one denies anything, the more they believe it.

During the evening we heard that the Communists were retreating north into the mountains. They had been defeated near the Yellow River, leaving more than 100,000 dead. In a few days the Nationalist troops would arrive. Everybody looked unusually happy, and those whom I met gave me a friendly smile as if to imply:

'I said you knew something, and I was right.'

The truth of these rumours was extremely doubtful, but hope is the comfort of the hopeless, and even I began to believe them, the

more so as the head of the chamber of commerce had said to me a few days previously:

'We don't want territory, and if the government troops arrive we shall just retreat.'

If only it had been true! The mind accepted the dream so willingly, despite the danger that the scene might change once again and destroy that hope.

The troops continued to pass. Evening came, it grew dark, and still they marched by. Perhaps some chief would come and say, 'Go home,' or 'Pack your bundle and follow us,' but I refused to believe that the latter was possible, for it was not what I longed to hear.

#### *10th November*

The illusion that the Communists were retreating was encouraged by the news of the judge's return. Doubtless he would come and tell us something. We waited for him with the trepidation of pupils waiting for a professor to tell them the results of an examination. Would we be promised liberty, or be imprisoned among those mysterious mountains? We tidied up our squalid hovel as best we could, prepared a stool and awaited the hoped-for and dreaded moment.

He arrived about nine. He was just the same—thin, with a half-open mouth and malicious eyes; we could learn nothing from that enigmatic face. His newly shaved head shining in the sun like an early water-melon, he came into the courtyard, bowed to us, and we followed him into the house without any ceremony and in a state of anxiety. If he told us, 'You are free,' what could I say to express my gratitude? And if he told us to pack our bundles?

He sat down and looked at us one after the other as if to make sure that we were still the same, and as if he wanted to spy out the misery that weighed us down.

'You have been very busy these last days,' said Father Perottoni.

'Yes—a series of conferences, all for the good of the people.' He turned to me suddenly. 'During my absence, have you sent anyone to fetch the medicines or not?'

This sentence acted like an evil spell in dispersing all our dreams. There was to be neither liberty nor bundles. Nothing had changed; we were still prisoners.

Yet his manner was so mysterious that I felt something must have happened. That morning I had met outside the village a Christian who had recommended us to be ready. In the evening I went out

again, hungry for news, and met the judge's secretary crossing a field of corn. I asked him if he knew anything.

'I suspect that something is happening,' he replied, 'but really I know nothing.'

He said good-bye and retraced his steps. I stopped and looked after him almost angrily; he had said that vague sentence as if he had revealed some frightening news.

### 11th November

Nobody was allowed to leave the village. The boys had once again been mobilized to watch the cross-roads, with orders to stop everyone. The judge told us that they had taken these precautions because there were so many spies and criminals sent by Chiang Kai-shek's government to poison the wells.

'We have caught and crucified several of them,' he said.

He had, however, come to discuss something quite different.

'When shall we send the servant for the surgical instruments?'

'As soon as possible—in three or four days.'

I tried to seem unusually interested, for we wanted to ask a favour.

'Forgive me, judge,' said Father Perottoni. 'We have been without wood for some days. Could you allow the servant to go to—'

'And then,' I intervened, 'we must have Laohao to take the servant's place when he goes to Tienchiaching.'

'Have I not already told you that the Christians are free to come?'

There was nothing to be said. He was a clever actor.

I wrote later: 'To-morrow, with the judges's permission, the servant will go to Tienchiaching to ask for two or three days' supply of wood. The rest will be brought us by the Christians in turn. In this way, we shall have the pleasure of seeing someone from time to time without any difficulty.'

After dinner, so as to keep his word and to put into practice all the kindness he had promised us that morning, the judge stopped and imprisoned two Christians from Suiyeh.

'They had a little bundle with them,' said *La Moresina*.

'You saw them enter the village?'

'Yes.'

'But how did they manage it?'

'The boys on guard let them pass when they heard they were coming to see you.'

Unfortunately, though they had surmounted one danger, they had

fallen into another. With the excuse of fetching the newspaper, we sent the servant in the hope that he would pick up some information near the prison. He returned with the news that the Christians had been set free after being threatened with being buried alive if they were seen again. The bundle had been seized and its contents distributed among the soldiers.

*12th November*

Another Christian came with his mother. He was ill and wanted medicine, but was stopped at the gate and not allowed in because he was a Christian. Father Perottini and Father Monti were out and the servant had left early for Tienchiaching. The poor man cried, begged, showed the wounds he had received in various battles. He had been a soldier, one of those soldiers whom the Communists call 'volunteers.' His mother knelt before the judge's door weeping and beseeching, until, after two hours, the judge lost his temper and ordered her to go away, threatening torture if she did not obey. He said to the son:

'You are a soldier. Go and look for the army doctors.'

Which meant: 'You are ill. You can die. Soldiers have no rights.'

In the afternoon, the judge sent me a number of patients, among them three soldiers. They were not Christians, so were allowed to enter. Without saying a word, one of them made the sign of the cross and I went up to him.

'Father,' he said, 'I am not ill. I only want the medicine for that poor fellow who came this morning.'

*13th November*

After we had been expecting him for several days, Ma Shan arrived. The soldiers did not want to let him pass, but he said that he had some important news to give me about the hospital.

Alas, all hopes of freedom had disappeared. When the first news had come of the possibility of our liberation, I had seized it avidly. I had lived, as it were, in a glow of hope, trying to banish the fear of failure. I had been happy, but I had also thought: 'If the plans fail how shall I bear the blow? Shall I have the strength to face it, to accept it with courage?' I had feared that it might be too great a trial for me, and had hoped desperately that God would not allow such a disaster to happen. But the disaster came.

I tried to forget my anger and to distract my thoughts by looking

at Ma Shan, with his flat face, but with a heart of gold, and by thinking of all the fatigue and danger he had to face in order to earn a few pennies. Bowed under a weight that a European could hardly have carried, he crossed the mountains by the roughest paths, 'sustained by the hope,' he explained, 'that I can be of some use, or at least can see you.'

I looked at him with affection and almost with envy. I should have liked to share his fatigue and his danger.

'This time,' he said, 'I have had to waste several days because I wanted to prepare a good deal of cotton. The Old Grandfather in the Sky has blessed me. I sold it all this morning and I've earned enough money to buy a little ox.'

The Chinese people seem to have this gift for business in their blood. One asks a little boy seated beside the road with a small basket containing some trifles, 'What are you doing?' And he answers quite gravely, 'I'm in business.' It is astonishing to see these little wayside traders, who cannot write their own names, going from one village to another, crying their wares, advising on the sale of animals and land, keeping accounts, deciding on the wisdom of buying or selling things, giving their opinions on the current prices of tobacco, cotton, millet and peanuts.

When they grow up they enter 'big business.' With the sale of what their little fields produce, they buy a quantity of goods, put them on their shoulders or on one of those strange wheelbarrows with huge creaking wheels, and sometimes go hundreds of miles to reach a market where their wares will command the highest prices. When he says, 'I am in business,' a Chinese seems to feel that he is uttering a charm that will protect him from every peril and he ventures to places where his presence may arouse suspicion and his life may be in danger. He has a wonderful gift for dealing with difficult situations.

The Chinese never throw anything away; everything is of use in business. During my first months in China, I was filled with astonishment and pity for the poor old men who every day had their little stalls at the side of the road, offering bent nails, slippers, orange peel, vases, books, frying-pans, bits of wireless-sets in a deplorable condition and I used to think, 'How can they make money and keep themselves alive with such goods?' Gradually I realized that even this strange kind of business made a profit on what was bought and sold. So, little by little, they amassed a considerable amount of money.

Apparently the Communists favour these small traders, and wel-

comed the appearance of people like our Christians who brought various products into the zone. The Communists did not make many enquiries into this business, which was becoming quite important, with unscrupulous traders, taking advantage of this indifference, carrying on a clandestine traffic in arms.

The advent of Communism had apparently little effect on the condition of internal trade; it might even have improved it. At the time of which I write, the little town of Hochien was busier than ever. Large paper posters in curious shapes, and covered with the strangest ideographs, hung beside or over the shops and danced gaily in the air, announcing the name and fame of the goods for sale. Traders in wood, fruit, vegetables, trinkets or things stolen during the capture of enemy cities, lined the sides of the narrow streets, leaving very little room for traffic to force its way through, and so increasing the nervousness of the pedestrians. The noise was deafening. People crowded the shops, paying if necessary in five- or ten-dollar notes. If a shopper did not happen to have a five-dollar note, he calmly cut a ten-dollar note in half, paid and went off. A Communist idea!

To cross that town was a nightmare, not so much from the curiosity one's 'long' European nose aroused and which gave rise to comments more or less kindly, while about us 'Yang-kwei-tzü'<sup>1</sup> passed from mouth to mouth, as from the confusion caused by people, baskets, donkeys, bundles and carts. Despite the fact that it was a gay, brightly coloured scene, in which one saw many of the ancient customs of China, the careful observer could not pass through that seething crowd without noticing something that aroused an unexpected indefinable disgust, almost amounting to fear. Among those many faces, some thoughtless and some wise, there were suspicious, evil eyes. The people, fortunately or unfortunately, did not seem aware of these persons who watched, followed, spied on every movement. They were 'the eye of Communism.' I saw them in the first days of my imprisonment, in that street, among the same crowd, staring at me, cursing me. . . . And the head of the chamber of commerce was not among the worst.

The most fortunate traders are those who come from a non-Communist zone. All that they earn is their own property and on the morrow, when they return to their homes, they can enjoy the fruits of their labours without any fear. The others cannot do so, private profit being considered a crime. Then why do they work so

<sup>1</sup> 'Foreign devils.'

hard? They make enough in two or three days and the rest is lost, but they do not realize it. The desire for money is stronger than their reasoning powers and some of them tempt fortune. She favours them for a little and then . . .

Each man who leaves a village to go to the market must state what he is taking, and have the written permission of the head of the village, and a permit with a red stamp. The brave man who wants to make some money unknown to the head of the village states the amount of goods and then, before he leaves, doubles or trebles them. Having arrived at the market he will look for a trustworthy person from a non-Communist zone either to sell or buy the goods. The trick, which may be forgiven, may succeed once, twice, thrice or ten times, but the eleventh time the unfortunate man is caught. The informer may be a fellow villager whom he meets on the way to market; it may be his own son, who, questioned by the People's Commissar, says carelessly, 'Daddy's gone to market with two sacks of beans, with two baskets of fruit,' or something else. It may happen that some People's Commissar sees this fine fellow with a very large load, wants to know, wants to see the permit. The trick is discovered and there is no saint to intercede for him. A People's Court is held, followed by confession and punishment. All his earnings, his house, life itself, and often the lives of his family will be the price he will have to pay for the foolish desire to make money.

The injustice of a law that preaches love of one's neighbour and in practice does nothing but grind him down is evident and is hated by all. The Communists realize what a bad impression this makes and try to save face. The usual means is the newspaper. Poor scrap of paper! It must make enormous efforts to conceal the crimes of its masters by lying.

'In this village the people have improved their standard of living by trading, while previously they died of hunger. In that other, the people have become so rich (always by trade) that they are building new houses, buying land . . . and happiness!'

It is very significant that in the Communist zone commerce on a large scale does not exist. It is quite true that one sees long columns of carts on their way with cotton to the chamber of commerce, where it is registered and sent to various prearranged centres, but it is not an individual or a firm that buys or sells the cotton. Private business firms disappeared some time ago—that is to say, from the moment the Communists occupied the zone. In the two towns of Hochien and

Linhsien, the headquarters of the firms and the big warehouses for salt, cotton, coal, etc., were all seized by the Communists, who then installed their innumerable organizations. I often went into these places and used always to ask the person who accompanied me, who fortunately was hardly ever the same person.

'Did you build these?'

'Don't you see they're old?'

'Whom did they belong to?'

The cunning ones avoided answering; the others told me quietly that they were formerly warehouses.

'Old warehouses? Then where are the owners?'

'They aren't here any more.'

And they were silent, afraid of having said too much. And undoubtedly the owners who did not succeed in escaping came to a tragic end.

When the Communists destroyed everything that had belonged to the enemy (they ought to have destroyed also the store of silver dollars and the barrels of opium stolen at Hantan when the Japanese left the town), and when they blew up the bridges and the great industrial centres, one put it down to their ignorance, saying, 'They are afraid of being driven back into the mountains and so they are destroying everything.' But when I saw them treating the people so brutally, I could no longer understand what they were doing. I asked for explanations of these terrible manifestations of Communism, and they replied:

'You don't understand anything. Could the Yellow River destroy so many villages if it had not so much water? No. The people have been ruined by the rich. Our first task is to purge society and then to direct and control commerce. Those who listen will be happy, the others will dig their own graves. They wish to perish and they shall perish.'

*14th November*

The judge came to enquire about the arrival of Ma Shan and went on to ask if the surgical instruments had come. His attitude annoyed me and I went out, leaving Father Perottoni and Father Monti to deal with the odious man.

But I must learn to control myself or my life at the hospital would be nothing but torture. The hospital? And if it were a trick? So many lies. . . . The Communists were—what they were. . . . I was their

enemy, therefore . . . I felt desperate, thinking again of escape. This thought had been tormenting me for days and it returned in all its strength. But would my companions have sufficient courage to face once more the tragedy of July? Should I escape alone? What would be the result for them? We must escape together. And then . . . ? My mind lost itself in a labyrinth of ideas, and the more I tried to find a way out, the more I felt that I was going round and round in a cage.

The servant came back from Tienchiaching with some Christians. The episode of the letter had been forgotten, for there had been very serious developments of another kind. Courts and meetings had been suspended; everyone had been mobilized; men from fifteen to forty-five had been enrolled as *Min Ping* and had to appear with their rifles before the head of the zone within three days; the others were to serve as stretcher-bearers and porters. The orders had reached the villages the previous morning. Each family had to prepare flour, corn and firewood, and the women had to give slippers to the heads of the villages. If the troops arrived, the boys, helped by the women, would have to boil water for them. Men over fifty would be under the orders of the head of the district and were to act as despatch-bearers. All the villages within a radius of from four hundred to five hundred *li* had been mobilized.

Nobody knew the reason for all these preparations; perhaps they meant war. The blow would be decisive, wherever it fell. If the Communists were victorious it meant that the whole of northern China would be in their hands. From the letters that we received from the missionaries at Changte, it appeared likely that the attack would be there, or north of the Chang River. Two armies of Nationalists had left that town for the north, to clear the railway as far as Peking. We hoped they would succeed.

15th November

The servant left with Ma Shan. His instructions were clear: nobody was to return before the end of the month, and then, as on every other occasion, with empty hands. With the country in its present state, it would be easy to deceive the judge and company.

Longing to get some news, we went to see the judge's secretary to ask for a newspaper. There had been a great Communist victory in Shansi. The city of Luan had fallen. Three armies, hundreds of guns and thousands of machine-guns had been captured. The latest edition

of the papers were full of abuse of the Nationalist troops, ‘who come to disturb the peace of our Communist country, to violate the women, to burn our houses.’ They invited the people to rise against the usurpers, the brigands, the murderers.

The situation appeared very serious. There were fewer patients; even the chiefs, including the head of the chamber of commerce, seemed to have given up being ill. The whole valley was a remarkable sight. Parties of men with rifles on their shoulders were leaving the villages. Young men, bowed under enormous loads, were coming down from the mountains towards the river where they met, forming a disorderly mob. A clamour of voices, a coming and going, men hurrying from one group to another—general confusion that suggested an enormous ant-heap. If the Communists were defeated, it would be the end of us also. It would be better to try to escape. Perhaps we were all thinking the same thing, but no one dared to say so.

‘And if the Communists were to get the worst of it,’ I said to my companions, ‘would it not be a good thing to look for somewhere we could hide?’

‘And where could we hide?’ answered Father Perottoni.

He was right and there was complete silence. I went out and walked up and down. The more I walked, the more confused my mind became.

About two o’clock in the morning, my legs refused to carry me any longer, and I sat down on a heap of straw. In front of me, quite close to the opposite wall, I could see clearly the grinding-stone, which was hard at work those days grinding corn for the Communists. I looked at it absent-mindedly.

‘If the space below it were empty?’

The idea excited me and I went over to it, but it was too dark to be able to judge. ‘To-morrow,’ I said, and went to bed, delighted at having found a possible refuge.

*16th November*

Immediately after Mass I ran to look at the grinding-stone and studied it closely. It was an enormous solid block of stone supported on a base about a yard high made of squared stones held together by a little lime. With a small piece of wire, I scraped out some of the lime and made a hole. There was an empty space below the stone, with plenty of room for three persons. Now it was necessary to make sure that I had struck a hiding-place that would not be suspected. I called Father Monti.

'I've found a wonderful hiding-place. It's in one of these courtyards. I'll give you till this evening to discover it.'

Fearing that this hiding-place might not be very safe, I set out to try to find another retreat. I wanted to ask *La Moresina* to let me go into the house to investigate, but that seemed too dangerous because it was necessary to conceal my plan and I did not want anyone to know it. In the evening I asked Father Monti the result of his search. He pointed out several holes, but not the one below the grinding-stone. The test had been successful; in case of need, we could hide there without the risk of being discovered.

After supper, the judge sent to say that he would take me next day to see the hospital. That man was always an insoluble mystery to us. When the world seemed likely to collapse at any moment, he showed an astonishing calm. A few days ago we had expected him to say, 'You are free.' Instead he had come, unruffled as ever, to talk to me about the hospital and the medicines. Now once again, when the existence of Communism seemed to hang in the balance, he wanted to talk about the hospital. Never a word, never a gesture betrayed his thoughts. His conduct to us was impeccable. The complete actor, he played his part to perfection.

17th November

As he so much wished to provide medicines for his hospital, the judge sent an old man to me with four boxes of ergotin and two boxes of camphorated oil. The old man asked me what they were worth.

'Are they yours?'

'Yes, the judge wants me to sell them to the hospital.'

Poor old man, he was pleased to be able to get rid of the things that he had had hidden for some time, with the risk of being hanged if they were found. He was still more pleased when I told him their value; it seemed impossible for him to think of having so much money. He ran back with them to the judge, who, afraid of being cheated, came to me:

'You have seen those medicines?'

'Yes, they are good—the best German manufacture, and very useful for the hospital.'

'And what are they worth?'

'At least fifty dollars a phial.'

'We shall see,' he said and went thoughtfully away.

Shortly afterwards I saw the old man come out of the judge's door with uncertain steps. He stopped for a moment, looked about in a worried way and then took a path leading to the mountains. I could not restrain my curiosity to know what had happened, so I joined him outside the village. The judge had confiscated the medicines and sent him away, saying:

'You have some more. Go home for them and do not forget to bring them all.'

'But . . .'

'Get out, your scoundrel!'

This Communist wickedness made me furious. I said good-bye to the old man and added:

'If they do anything to you, come and see me.'

And what, indeed, could I have done? Was I not a prisoner? But I was glad I had said that.

I went with the judge to see the hospital and on the way I asked him what he had paid the old man for the medicines.

'The price you told me.'

I cannot express what I felt at that moment. I must confess it was more than anger—it was an overwhelming hatred. I seemed to be accompanied by a tiger.

We arrived at the hospital. I walked round without saying a word and returned to the courtyard.

The judge said: 'If there is anything you think should be altered, say so quite frankly.'

'The windows are too small. The plaster must be removed and the walls replastered. The stairs are impossible. The floors are too damp.'

He gave a melancholy smile.

'Where,' he asked, 'will you have the operating-theatre?'

'It is all very well to talk about an operating-theatre, but how about the surgeon?'

'You will be the surgeon.'

I too gave a melancholy smile. He understood that it was not a propitious day and, pleading business, let me go home alone. This was the end of my second visit to the hospital.

*18th November*

The terror created among the people by the mobilization a few days before made many of them behave in a strange way. Some committed suicide, others ran away, others wounded themselves. One

poor young man from a nearby village, Peimiao, rather than leave his family and face the probability of being killed, shot himself in the leg.

Naturally all his relatives, among them the head of the district and the president of the Peasants' Association, maintained that he had wounded himself while cleaning his rifle. No local doctor dared to undertake responsibility for this simple little case, so, knowing of my existence, because many people from the neighbourhood had come to me to be treated, they asked the judge to allow me to go and see him. After persisting for three days, they obtained his sanction, but only on condition that they paid me (!) a handsome fee. I went. The whole leg was swollen and bound up in some cotton from an old and dirty quilt. There was much clotted blood and pus. He was suffering a great deal and burning with fever. I dressed the leg and gave an injection to try to prevent the poison from spreading.

On my way back, I heard that a great battle was taking place at Tzechow, a place north of the Chang River, thirty-five miles from Changte. The Communist forces, about 400,000 men, had surrounded the two armies that had marched north a few days before. This news made me almost happy. The Nationalists had American equipment and the Communists were very poorly armed, so they might be wiped out once for all.

As soon as I got home, I heard that the Communists had been victorious. We were on the alert, straining our ears, waiting for the moment either to escape or to hide ourselves. We trusted the old village schoolmaster and begged him to keep us informed. We arranged a meeting-place with him in the open country behind a terrace hidden by a row of bushes, and then silence fell upon us.

## CHAPTER

13

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WHEN I arrived in China, one of the things that made the most impression on me was the sight of so many soldiers. Apparently I was in a militaristic country. I saw them wandering about the streets of the town in very plain uniforms, many devouring peanuts with obvious pleasure. There were two things that I could not understand: why were there so many soldiers? and why were they all wearing slippers instead of nailed boots? This second problem I tried to explain to myself by thinking that the State was too poor to buy boots. I subsequently learned that this was not the reason, but that it was the tradition of the country for soldiers to wear slippers. The first question answered itself when I began to understand something of the maintenance of order in this most complicated society. In addition to the regular Nationalist army, organized and maintained by the State, there were detachments of soldiers attached to this or that political, administrative, juridical or other authority. Very often important commercial firms—as, for example, the company mining coal and iron—recruited a number of men to protect their own interests in case of danger. Among such risks was that of brigandage. A short while before the Japanese invasion, the two coal mines about seven *li* from Suiyeh were attacked by brigands. The soldiers in charge of the mines were overpowered and the brigands, not having found what they hoped for, destroyed the machinery. All idlers who did not wish to work took to soldiering and were determined on one thing—to enjoy life at the expense of the people. It was a kind of amicable brigandage which gave a good deal of trouble, but did not compare with the Communist atrocities. The people were accustomed to it. It was an immemorial custom, and they paid with money for the quiet that they could not obtain by other means.

Under the Communists, the business is less complicated, but more

evil. The whole of the population is militarized. In vast barracks, there are three groups more highly trained than the rest: the *Pa Lu*, the *Min Ping* and the *Tzü Tung Ping*—the ‘volunteers.’ The army, it must be admitted, is organized with an ability never before known in China.

All the efforts made by European instructors in the past to train Chinese troops had failed. There was a momentary improvement, but once this support was withdrawn, the machine fell to pieces. In the last Sino-Japanese war, the soldiers of the Rising Sun, despite their undoubted military ability, often found themselves in critical and sometimes disastrous positions. When they occupied Lanfeng, they suffered considerable losses; the town was taken and lost at least four times with serious tactical results. Only when the European officers who were in charge of the Chinese forces withdrew did the Japanese become masters of the strategic position. This shows that the Chinese soldier had fine fighting qualities, but lacked good leaders.

Such things, however, do not happen in the Communist army, perhaps because it never lacks foreign—Russian—support. Even leaving this factor out of account, I think the Communist soldier would behave in the same way, for the training he receives and the diabolical spirit drilled into him make him a complete contrast to the lazy, spiritless soldier in the Nationalist army. I will try to describe the Communist soldier as I have seen him.

Like the soldiers in the opposing army, he wears a pair of cloth slippers; his uniform is the colour of mud, badly cut and often patched. His puttees look as if they have come from some folklore museum; I have even seen the stoles worn by Catholic priests for church services used as puttees. Round his waist he wears a leather or cotton belt, which, besides its normal use, often serves for other purposes. Hanging from it are a little bowl, hand-grenades and the chop-sticks with which he eats. In his tunic pockets are always a pencil or a fountain-pen (it does not matter if he cannot write), and the inevitable toothbrush. I do not know if there is not also a tube of toothpaste! He seems more civilized than he is, carrying a toothbrush for the ridiculous reason that ‘it looks smart.’ The private’s and the general’s uniforms are the same. Neither senior nor junior officers wear any rank-badges, the reason being quite simple: if they fall into the enemy’s hands, no one can tell an officer from a private. They carry no identification papers with them, and if they are killed they are carried to the rear and buried in safe places. The wish to record their first names and their surnames is a scandalous weakness; to notify their relatives of their

death is quite inconceivable. When there are no barracks, the officers must find accommodation for their men in private families, who must always give up their best rooms.

'The Communist soldier is a fighting man,' said a stunted little chattering to me. He was all eyes and tongue. And these fighting men never have a moment's rest. They are up at dawn and do physical drill, then there is an hour's lecture on Communist principles and on hatred of the secret enemy who 'spreads alarm and despondency.' Military training fills a good part of the day, then there is singing, a second meal, a lecture, more singing, and finally the poor soldier can lie down on a bed of wood or bricks. Only in the case of special duties is a man exempt from this iron discipline. The soldier must never be allowed a free minute, for such a minute might be dangerous. The reason for this bewildering activity, which would seem incredible if one had not seen it, is almost entirely psychological. The more a man is compelled to lead a hard life, the more he feels the longing for a friendship that at least provides him with an emotional outlet. But in China, Communism is fundamentally suspicious, and so it naturally asks: 'What does he feel?' The answer is inevitable—either the two friends are loyal Communists and so there is nothing to fear, or they are not. And then . . . ? The Communists strike at the root of any possibility of spreading complaints, disloyal thoughts, or anything which might undermine the spirit of the army. I have already explained that during the lectures they inculcate hatred of the secret enemy.

The Communists are not so simple-minded as to think that all soldiers are fanatical adherents of the new creed or even harmless creatures. They know that in the army, despite all the surveillance, there are spies or men paid to spread discontent, so they adopt these measures hoping to reduce anti-Communist propaganda to a minimum.

Compelled to lead such a life, the soldier almost unconsciously begins to long for some fighting, which will give him some emotional outlet, however dangerous it may be. The senior officers know this and make use of it. Except for fighting, the only change a soldier can hope for is an order for the transfer of arms and equipment to some other village. This seems to happen frequently, because I often heard that soldiers were on the march quite close to our village. This change of quarters, which is a relief to the soldier, causes alarm among the people. Are they going to fight? Where are they coming from? This is the outcome of iron discipline and internal surveillance from which no one escapes.

Here, as in other spheres, a companion may be a spy. And the mesh is so closely woven that everyone believes that he is spying on the others. Such a defensive attitude in the turmoil of the soldier's life is of first-class importance to the leaders. Every act, every word that might give rise to suspicion, is reported and examined in the minutest detail. This happens especially with new recruits, who are ignorant of the Communist way of life and whose minds are 'still impregnated with old ideas,' and so may make unwise remarks. They are novices and therefore a little understanding on the part of the officers is not out of place. Whoever is discovered to have committed some fault that is not beyond suspicion is not punished as an old hand would be, but is taught—that is to say, is sent to a suitable place and exposed to an inhuman examination. 'You have said this, you have done that. What do you mean? What was in your mind?' Then there follows the so-called *t'an-pai t'an-pai* (confession), and the poor wretch, terrified at such treatment, contradicts himself, excuses himself, says first one thing and then another, denies, then blames himself. It is not enough: he must explain everything that passed through his mind. No matter whether what he says is inconclusive and contradictory, his questioner will co-ordinate and sum it up. All this is first-class material and provides an opportunity to investigate, to study the soldier's mentality. When, after hours of indescribable mental torture (I can speak from personal experience), the inquisitors are satisfied, they send the victim away and decide on their verdict. Have they found a man who is likely to become a fanatical Communist as the result of training? Then he will be forgiven. Or have they found some flaw? Then he will be liquidated. Every soldier, from the day that he enters the Communist army, must pass through the crucible of a very severe scrutiny; he must submit to the daily lectures, the training, the iron discipline—if necessary, to confession. All this has created the ideal Communist soldier, daring, fearless, despising death, ruthless to the enemy; and when he appears, the Nationalists tremble.

During my first year in China, when I was beginning my real life as a missionary, going from village to village in my immense district, I arrived one day at an enchanting little place in the gorges of the mountains on the edge of the sub-prefecture of Anyen. The war against Japan was at its height and the mountains offered a secure refuge for the soldiers who were flying before the invaders. I spent a week in the village, the inhabitants of which were all Christians.

When I decided to leave I was not able to do so. The Japanese had

pursued the fugitives and were entering the gorges, cutting off communications. I was full of pity for the escaped soldiers—dirty, miserable and, having lost their slippers, with their feet covered with blood. Some had thrown away their rifles, but still grasped a handful of cartridges. Others had torn off the sleeves of their tunics to bandage their wounds. I did what I could for them.

'Where are the Japanese?' I asked.

'They are very near.'

'How many are they?'

'Oh, Father, more than two thousand.'

'And how many are you?'

'We are numberless.'

'Then why . . . ?'

'Ah, you don't understand. The Japanese fight so seriously. They surround us and don't even leave a *hou men*<sup>1</sup> through which we can escape.'

Such a mentality would make a child laugh and shows an appalling lack of military training. This is not to be seen in the Communist army, and when the people want to describe courage and ferocity they say:

'The Communists are the heirs of the Japanese spirit.'

Everyone believes that if the Nationalists had had a tenth of the Communists' courage, the Japanese would have been driven out of China in a few days, because the Nationalists had American equipment and enjoyed the material and moral support of the people. I often heard it said:

'The sufferings inflicted by the Communists would be nothing if we were sure that Chiang Kai-shek's troops would soon arrive.'

Instead, what happened? These troops ensconced themselves in easily defended towns and waited for the Communists to come and attack them. The only thing they did was to try to impress the people by publishing the number of the Communist losses, never realizing that such statements would finally create distrust and pessimism among the people, which was what the Communists hoped for.

When a man joins the Communist forces, willingly or unwillingly, he must say good-bye for ever to his freedom. His life will be spent in battles and attacks, interspersed from time to time with periods of rest, which are really courses of training for further fighting. Leave after a certain length of service is inconceivable; his discharge for an

<sup>1</sup> Back door.

unlimited period will come only with death or such a serious wound that he can no longer serve. Every soldier must understand that his very existence is indissolubly linked with the profession he has adopted, just as a stone is part of a building. It is practically impossible to escape. These men with their gloomy faces accept their fate with complete cynicism.

Accustomed, as I have said, to blood and danger, knowing they may die at any moment, they grasp at every little opportunity for pleasure with a feline avidity. They snatch at every moment as it flies, without retaining any memory of it. They are like a magnetic needle oscillating nervously between life and death, between darkness and light, with no interregnum between the two, an existence in which there is neither a past nor a future, but only a present. The dynamo that drives them on enables them to perform remarkable feats of arms.

It is not so much their military tactics as their reckless daring that upsets the enemy's plans and is the secret of the astonishing Communist victories. In their brief periods of rest, their singing is a nervous sob accompanied by jerky movements; their joy is a sudden flame which consumes itself. They create fear when they laugh. They never stay in one place, going from one village to another with the rapidity of a turbine engine driven on by the restlessness of demons. The people fear their coming, not only for the inconvenience caused by unwelcome guests, but also because of the nightmare feeling that precedes and accompanies their appearance. Unconsciously, perhaps, they adopt the same surprise tactics as they do in war.

It is well known that Communist ability lies in glorifying human weaknesses as virtues and making use of them. I remember the broken sentences of the people when the Communists were preparing for the attack on Suiyeh.

"They are a hundred thousand, two hundred thousand. Where have they sprung from?"

It was heart-breaking to listen to words that ended in a deep sigh. The people had been accustomed to avoid and foresee danger. As if by secret radio, rumours would spread from village to village, often from province to province, like some mysterious echo. Accompanied by fantastic exaggerations, they were known to every family, and every family, however frightened, could prepare for and if possible avoid the danger of which they had been warned. Now, instead, the system created by some good spirit seemed to have disappeared before

the violence of the Bolsheviks. No one had ever talked of an attack on Suiyeh, still less of an attack in such alarming numbers.

What happened elsewhere was only a repetition of what happened at Suiyeh. Taken by surprise, the defenders were thrown into confusion, and the Red victories multiplied.

Full credit must also be given to the Communist spirit of self-sacrifice and abnegation when there is no element of surprise. What does it matter if this spirit is not the spirit of patriotism that transforms the soldier into a hero? The Communists need muscles and blood; romantic ideas are a forbidden luxury. What happened at Yunyen is typical.

After the surrender of Japan, the defence of this little town to the east passed automatically into the hands of an ex-brigand, 'Iron Head,' a man famous for his former crimes, who, after his conversion to the Nationalist cause, devoted himself to fighting Communism.

Before the Communists advanced on Yunyen, 'Iron Head' ordered all the women, children and old people to take refuge in the country. The first assault cost the Communist 20,000 men. A few days after this defeat, they returned to the attack, and 'Iron Head,' with what seemed like complete recklessness, ordered the gates of the town to be opened. The Communists rushed in shouting with joy—but there were traps within the gates. 'Iron Head' had had enormous holes dug. Beyond them was a platform built like a fort and there he had placed his men. The holes were filled with corpses and even the gates were blocked with dead and wounded.

After four days of desperate fighting, the Reds tried to scale the walls. Suddenly they found themselves confronted by a hedge of flame that surrounded the town. They waited for the conflagration to die down, but 'Iron Head' had enough wood and petrol to exhaust their patience. They tried other methods, but the heroic defenders fought on.

The story of 'Iron Head' was on everybody's lips. The Communists talked of him with contempt and abuse, but the people with admiration and hope. Some deified him.

This man's heroism could not be ignored by the Nationalist government, who decided to assist him at all costs. Surrounded as he was, it was only possible to send help by air, for which a landing-strip was essential.

'Send your aeroplanes,' said 'Iron Head.' 'In eight days a landing-strip will be ready.'

He chose an area in the middle of the town, had the houses destroyed, levelled it as best he could, and, on the day he had promised, the landing-strip was ready.

The Communist attack increased in violence. One night the town was surrounded by very large forces, and the last hour of that valiantly held oasis seemed to have come. 'Iron Head' was not alarmed. He divided his forces into two detachments, the larger to defend the town at all costs, the other, under his own command, to leave the town, break through the enemy, reach the river and blow up the banks.

The following night, made even darker by a violent thunderstorm, the gallant party left the north gate of the town and plunged into an inferno of noise. Next morning the country resembled a large lake and Yunyen, like a great ship, floated in the midst of a silence of death.

Ten days later 'Iron Head,' with the survivors of his heroic band, slipping among swollen corpses, returned to his town.

'That,' I wrote during my imprisonment, 'was twenty days ago and there is no news that the Communists have attempted to attack again. It was a repulse that they will remember for some time.'

This is not to deny the furious courage with which they fling themselves into a fight. In an encounter with the Nationalists who were advancing protected by tanks, the soldiers of General Liu Pei-cheng attacked even the tanks, climbing on them and trying to open the turrets with levers, so as to pour in petrol in the hope of burning the crews. Many were killed, but they managed to put two tanks out of action.

Wishing to imitate the Japanese, they formed a special force of suicide squads, to be called upon at critical moments or for desperate enterprises. For example, in attacks on towns it was their job to blow up the gates. Dressed in sacks filled with dynamite, those who managed to reach their objective fired a revolver shot into a sack or set it on fire with a match and flung themselves into the arms of death.

The Communists' arms were not to be compared with those possessed by the Nationalists. Even in the army, soldiers were to be seen with rifles mended with wire. I asked who dared to fire such a weapon.

'It is a very good foreign rifle,' answered one. 'After firing it, I don't have to put it in water to cool it. I can keep on firing.'

They explained to me that rifles made in China have to be plunged into water after five or six shots. The best arms were those stolen

from the Japanese when they retired, or those carried off as booty from the Nationalists.

'So far,' I wrote, 'I have not seen any guns. No doubt they have some, but cannot use them for lack of ammunition. Nor have they any tanks or aeroplanes.'

When talking of such things, they always made the same remark:

'We were born in misery and we are creating our lives by courage and sacrifices. Our arms are bought with the blood of our soldiers. Let them bring aeroplanes, guns and machine-guns from America, and we'll plan how to get hold of them.'

Some years before, the local forces of the Reds were in desperate straits for ammunition. One day in the autumn of 1942, after a skirmish between the Communists and the Japanese not far from Suiyeh, Father Piazzoli and I went to the scene of the fight and found a silver bullet—an unheard of thing! We kept it as an interesting and valuable trophy. Later on, when we could talk to people who came from the Communist zone, we heard that the Reds had requisitioned everything made of copper, lead and tin to make bullets, and, when these metals were exhausted, had been compelled to use silver. It was a difficult time. Later on, things changed and through third parties they were able to buy rifles and ammunition, even from the Japanese. The only kind of arm the Communists never lacked were hand-grenades; even to-day the people make large quantities of them.

Having captured a town, the Communists' first care was to raze the walls to the ground. This was done even in the cities they swore they would never afterwards surrender. When I asked them the reason, they said:

'The walls are old and so they must disappear.'

Evidently they did not want to tell me the truth, and I was never able to discover why they did it.

I had now been in prison for four and a half months, and however much my mind shrank from facing certain problems, they remained like a thorn in my side and I could not refuse to accept the evidence of facts. I saw the power of the new tyrants increasing every day. They were always victorious and their fanatical courage seemed to be habitual, and so I asked myself why they did not attack the large cities. Perhaps they did not think it desirable, or—and this is an explanation I preferred to the previous one—they suffered from the same defect as the rest of their countrymen of doing things *ch'a pu to*—more or less. But this is not the whole truth.

'It is not,' said the Communists, 'that the countryside needs the city in order to live, but that the city needs the countryside. The corn, the millet, the cotton are all in our hands and when the moment comes, the city as well will fall into our hands.'

Their conviction that this would happen was as firm as the way in which they stated it was clarity itself.

The soldier is not interested in either politics or religion; he is equally indifferent to Buddhism and Catholicism, Taoism and Protestantism. In politics, he has but to understand that there is only one Party, the Communist. The foreigner, especially the missionary, must be hated because he grinds the faces of the poor, but it is not his business to deal with the matter; other people will attend to it. He is haughtier and prouder than it is possible to imagine: 'I am a Communist soldier!'

There is one question that one naturally asks: Can this soldier, on whose shoulders rests practically the whole weight of this tremendous work of conquest, look forward to any compensation, any reward for his sacrifices? The answer is easy. His leaders are not sparing in praise, in moving speeches that explain and glorify the bravery of the army and of individuals. As far as this goes, the soldier seems to swim in a world of kindness like a fish in the sea. But from a practical point of view things are very different.

As I have said, Communism regards its soldier as a machine that must act in perfect conformity with the will of the leaders, who need his flesh and blood to achieve their aim—the triumph of the Communist ideal. According to them, the soldier's highest reward is to die on the field of battle. He must not ask for anything, for that is a crime on the same level as spying and in consequence meets with the same punishment. Even if he is ill, he is treated with the same brutal discipline. Anyone asking for medicine is watched. The first time it may be overlooked, the second time it becomes a serious affair and the sick man's insistence is treated with terrible severity. The renewal of the request leads to *t'an-pai t'an-pai* and therefore to punishment. Even diseases are created by the leaders!

One thing that fills one with distrust and horror is to find, as branches of the main trunk of the army, small shoots whose lives are poisoned by vice and crime and who develop in an atmosphere of hate and passion incredible at their age. They are boys from twelve to fourteen who have run away from home 'to learn to be soldiers,' or who are the offspring of some Communist intrigue and so follow the army. Having no definite duties, they spend the whole day

lounging about and doing as they like. It is frightening to see a boy who has replaced his natural innocence by the precocious wickedness of a man. The jump into the void is terrifying and the consequences fearful to witness. When one goes near these boys, one feels the same sense of discomfort as one feels in the presence of something inanimate that is so disgusting and dangerous that one prefers to view it from a distance. They are emaciated and neurotic, petulant and boastful, with prematurely bowed shoulders, slender necks and rather large heads. They wander, shouting and blaspheming, from one group of soldiers to another, their wickedness shown by their restlessness, their jerky movements and their darting glances. All that is good in nature has been driven out by force, while all that is evil has taken its place. Their quarrelsomeness far surpasses the quick and easily forgiven quarrelsomeness of childhood, and there are horrifying scenes. If they are reprimanded, they reply with insolence and threats. Their way of speaking is abrupt and coarse. Their dirty, wrinkled faces are framed in enormous ears as dry as parchment, giving them the appearance of pale, broken-down old men. Accustomed to the sight of blood and the noise of battle, often insisting on their right to decide the fate of prisoners, these young delinquents exhibit a stupid and criminal seriousness.

One day, coming back from my usual round of visits to my patients, I fell in with one of these boys. He was seated on an old grinding-stone of a mill just outside the village, biting his nails nervously and staring at the ground. A large revolver hung from his waist. As soon as he saw me, he jumped up as if bent on mischief.

‘Who are you?’ he asked me curtly.

Knowing with whom I had to deal, I answered with respect: ‘I am the mandarin’s doctor.’

‘Then look at this wound.’

As he spoke he took off his trousers and ran his half-bitten nail along the purple edges of a large syphilitic sore.

‘You see? If you are intelligent you will be able to tell me how long I’ve been wounded, what sort of a bullet struck me and how soon I can be cured.’

And he looked at me suspiciously.

‘My dear boy, you have not been wounded by a bullet and if you want to be cured——’

‘Fool! I told you I’ve been wounded, and you must say the same thing.’

'Very well, I will say you've been wounded. And who wounded you?'

He sat down, took out a cigarette, lit it and smoked it with avidity until a sudden fit of coughing prevented him from breathing. When the attack was over, his vicious face covered with sweat, he began spitting and swearing.

'These cigarettes are filthy. Listen, you are a doctor. Have you ever seen a heart beating?' He removed his jacket and began to count his ribs: 'One, two, three, four . . . You take away this bone.'

I felt as if someone were really cutting my heart out.

'My boy, one does not do such things,' I said to him very seriously.

'Eh?' He jumped up a second time and we stared at each other.

I repeated: 'One does not do such things.'

'And who forbids it?'

'The Lord of the Sky.'

The evil gravity of the boy trying to look like a man changed suddenly into a coarse smile.

'But who are you?'

'I am a priest of the Catholic Church.'

He stepped back, thrust out his hand and said with bloodthirsty violence:

'Are you one of the three foreign devils captured at Suiyeh? Who knows if very soon I shan't have the pleasure of seeing your heart beat? I've been told that the foreign devils' hearts are stronger than ours.'

He closed his lips and gave a noisy sniff as if to taste in advance the joy of such a scene.

I do not know how I got away from the unfortunate boy.

Auxiliary to the Communist army are the *Min Ping*, 'the soldiers of the people.' The Communists have shown their usual astuteness in the organization of this force. The apparently excessive severity shown to those wishing to join the regular army is designed to give the people the impression that the army represents a privileged caste and that the rest are just scum. The people would willingly submit to this injustice if things stopped there and if the tyrants did not organize those they have rejected and make use of them, as I shall explain.

At first *Min Ping* were just groups of young men from the villages forced to go to the mountains every night, or to cross into the Japanese zone to blow up bridges, railways or small forts. In the end, they became a real army and were properly organized.

'Our people are threatened by internal and external enemies. Every village must provide for its own defence, recruiting those men who can bear arms.'

Who these dangerous and numerous enemies were, no one ever found out.

'This is what the chiefs say and we must believe them and do what they tell us.'

As the defence of the village was for the good of all, each family had to provide arms and ammunition.

The duties of *Min Ping* were not confined to mounting guard in the village, especially at night; they had also to control the conduct of the meetings and to go to the aid of the boys watching the roads. Their work did not give them any military status, and they were entirely under the orders of the mandarin. Given what I might call the traditional need of the Chinese people to protect themselves from bandits, the men, particularly the young ones, welcomed the chiefs' orders almost with enthusiasm and enrolled in the people's army. The mandarin, either directly or through the commissars, did everything possible to encourage any kind of keenness, and at suitable moments would issue appeals, even if these were in veiled language.

'Carry out your duties as if you were on the field of battle. Be ever on the alert. Your country always needs you.'

One day an order arrived that destroyed the pleasant illusion of those who thought that they would only use their rifles in their own villages or on parade.

'All the *Min Ping* must parade before the mandarin.'

The strangeness and the novelty of the order awakened suspicion, perhaps also some indefinable fear, but nobody understood or could criticize the mandarin's order—or worst of all, refuse to obey it, so they all set off. After a week or a fortnight they returned, silent and dispirited, often wounded and having lost many men, and had a practical demonstration of the rôle of *Min Ping* and what their real duties were. And while the people longed to solve such a vital mystery as the conduct of the chiefs, these bore themselves with complete shamelessness, as if they were proclaiming:

'It is natural that they should do what we want.'

When the Communists intend to give battle they augment their forces until they outnumber the enemy three, four or five times. 'Our enemies,' they say, 'have arms, but we have men.' This enormous increase consists of the *Min Ping*, organized and disciplined in a way

never before seen in China. The sudden appearance of such an overwhelming avalanche of men often involved the Nationalists in serious dangers. However active their intelligence service might be, it never succeeded in discovering how many men the Communists were putting into the field. Another horrible aspect of Bolshevik tactics is the order to the *Min Ping* to provide themselves not only with arms, but also with sufficient food for the time that they will be away from their villages.

Fifteen or twenty days before the Communists mean to attack, the usual order from the mandarin reaches the village, and it is heart-breaking to see the sequel. Women who dare not give vent to their sorrow and their hatred fill the men's knapsacks, their faces showing the misery they feel. The men, faced by this new danger, wander silently from courtyard to courtyard collecting hand-grenades, rifles, ammunition—sometimes ropes and ladders. The great characters on the walls of the houses, 'Women, do not weep if for some days your husbands do not sleep in your houses,' seem a wicked mockery.

They set off, perhaps accompanied by the furtive tears of their loved ones. When they reach the field of battle, the *Min Ping* are divided into three groups. One group will carry the ladders to the walls of the enemy's town; another group, their feet tied with ropes to prevent them from running away or surrendering, will scale the walls; a third group, and these are the most fortunate, will carry the dead and wounded from the field to prearranged places in the mountains.

All is ready. The trumpet call is drowned in the savage yells that mark the beginning of the fight. The first group of the *Min Ping* advance to the walls with the ladders, the second group, with their feet tied, climb the ladders to certain death while the Communists drive them on with their bayonets or kill the shirkers. A rain of fire descends on them. Cries of pain mingle with the shouts. The ladders break, the dead crash down, the ropes are withdrawn. What a sight! Here a leg, there a mutilated trunk, there a foot. . . . The attacks succeed each other with desperate fury and the bodies, smoking with hot blood, lie in heaps. A little longer, poor fellows, and the filthy feet of the Communists will be pressing you down as they utter shouts of victory.

'Women, do not weep if your husbands do not return.'

The incessant fighting caused terrible casualties; even in the Nationalist army there were startling losses. The Communists knew perfectly well that, without a highly trained army from the military

and ideological points of view, they would be ruined. To recruit more men, they thought of a new trick—the *Tzū Tung Ping*, the ‘Volunteers.’ One must not think of voluntary enlistment as it would be understood by any reasonable human being. The people know what war means and no one is so lacking in intelligence as to prefer death to life for the sake of the beautiful faces of the Reds. But even in this, the poisonous wickedness of the tyrants found a way of dealing with the situation.

The trick is played in two stages. The first consists of propaganda to explore and prepare the ground. The papers carry exaggerated praise of the ‘heroic volunteers,’ together with reports of speeches on this theme by the leaders, the propagandists, the People’s Commissars. In the villages, every wall is covered with slogans such as ‘Long live the volunteers,’ ‘The volunteers are the noblest of the people,’ ‘Young men, become volunteers,’ etc.

The people, amazed by this sudden outburst of propaganda, look round and ask themselves: ‘Who and where are these much-praised volunteers?’ They do not dare to enquire aloud for fear the answer will be: ‘You are the volunteers.’ Everyone tries to avoid dangerous encounters, to attend strictly to his own business, but that kind of electrical discharge generated by the Bolshevik mass forces its way into their minds and enables them to see with terrible clearness the fate that they hoped would never come upon them.

When the people have become saturated with propaganda and show themselves bored with the endless laudation of the *Tzū Tung Ping*, the curtain rises on the second act: the reaping of what has been sown.

The choice of the *Tzū Tung Ping* is made by a procedure worthy of people devoid of any vestige of conscience. A meeting is held to make the tragedy more impressive. As usual, the *Kung-tso-yuan* (People’s Commissar) is the speaker. He begins by praising the village, expatiating on the heroism of those who die for their country and exhorting all to follow their example. The people, as usual, listen with a very significant composure and silence. They know what the brigand wants and he equally knows what is passing through their minds. This invisible current will lead to the inevitable outburst of fury.

‘Be courageous,’ he goes on with a deceptive calm. ‘We do not compel anyone. Step forward all those who wish to give their names.’

The silence is the clearest proof of the wishes of the people; but it is decreed that the village must provide two, three or more volunteers

All the most persuasive arguments of the demagogue are given an airing and patiently elaborated; he promises rich rewards. But no one moves. He begins to lose patience, and gathers himself for a final effort. He recalls the sacrifices of so many heroes to give peace to the people, the terrible number of soldiers who have fallen in so many wars. Then, telling the whole story of the Red campaign, he talks of the losses of the village and closes with the appeal:

'Your companions who have fallen on the field of battle wait to be avenged!'

All listen terrified. Their eyes are fixed on the *Kung-tso-yuan*, but their hearts are filled with loathing and sorrow when they think of the husband, the son, the brother, the relative, dead no one knows where. . . .

'The best revenge,' said the people when they come to me for medicine, 'would be to take the *Kung-tso-yuan* and all the chiefs and roast them in a cauldron as they have roasted our people.'

'Who wishes to follow this honourable profession?' goes on the Commissar.

The young, in order not to compromise themselves, bow their heads. The disastrous experiences of others are a terrible warning.

I had often heard poor people say, 'My son did not bow his head and so he became a victim of the Communists.' I did not understand what they meant until I witnessed one of these meetings.

The Chinese are very much afraid of anyone who *teng-yen*—stares. There is a superstition that it brings a curse. When anyone stares, the people believe that it means that he is the prey of an evil spirit that is transmitted by his glance, or else that he cannot give vent to his anger and hatred in any other way and by staring transfers them to the other person.

The *Kung-tso-yuan*, after having exhausted all the arguments likely to arouse a martial spirit and the love of honour, perceives that the members of his audience have no desire to go and be killed. He then assails the people with vulgar abuse and threats. If any young man, astonished by the speaker's violence, stares at him instead of bowing his head like all the others, he falls a victim. The Commissar's eyes never leave him. He abandons his truculent tone and still staring at the incautious young man, says with an air of satisfaction:

'I see that there is a generous spirit among you. What is your name? Your example will be a reproof to the cowardice of your fellow villagers.'

All want to raise their heads, but terror stifles their natural curiosity. The fear that the poor victims may be a son or a husband causes an uneasy movement in the crowd, a sort of miserable shudder.

'Look at him, everybody!' cries the *Kung-tso-yuan* with an air of triumph.

The youth wakes as if from a dream to feel himself crushed by that pointing finger and the gaze of the crowd. He tries to say: 'But I . . .'

Poor fellow, he did not bow his head and so becomes a victim of the Communists.

If all the men keep their eyes on the ground and remain silent, the *Kung-tso-yuan* plays a cruel game with the unfortunate people.

'Certainly, you are quite right. What I am asking you is a very serious and a very fine thing, and before deciding, you want to think. So you *must* think.'

He retires and quietly smokes a cigarette. After hours and hours of a torture sufficient to exhaust the patience even of the Chinese, there is a stir. The old men approach the Commissar and, speaking on behalf of everybody, say:

'If you wish we are ready to pay a young man to go with you.'

The commissar is furious: 'Murderers! You wish to bribe your young men! Come!'

He rises and leads them onto the platform where the plays are acted and denounces them to the people as traitors, oppressors of the people. The abuse that follows is sickening. The people are amazed. The stage that has seen so many tragedies now becomes a place of execution. It is no longer a play by this or that author; it is the cruel reality being enacted before their eyes. The crowd can no longer contain itself.

'Cursed dog!' cries the son who sees his father's blood flowing beneath the blows of the stick. He jumps onto the platform and attacks the *Kung-tso-yuan*.

'Cursed dog!' he repeats, and, with hands like an eagle's claws, he seizes that evil throat and does not let go until he sees the eyes bulging and the tongue turning black. The oaths of the crowd are the accompaniment to the man's death rattle. Unfortunately this foolish conduct will be the cause of even more cruel tragedies. Not only the son, but also all the family will be wiped out to pay for the blood of the man whom the Communists acclaim as a hero while they denounce the people as criminals.

The village will pay dearly and will never know peace until it gives

up its young men to the Communists. Everyone must understand that the new overlords are the absolute masters of every man's life, and that it is utterly useless to organize demonstrations, which only provoke brutal reprisals and so bring such tragic consequences.

Forced to submit to this tyranny, the old men agree among themselves and implore the heads of families to bow to the will of the *Kung-tso-yuan* and sacrifice two or three young men, paying the fathers a large sum of money. In the future, when the people understand that meetings always involve beatings, meetings are no longer necessary. An order is sufficient. 'The village X must provide two, five, seven volunteers.' This does not end the oppression, but at least it frees the people from the terror of the meeting. Unfortunately such a period does not last long. After a certain time, the tragedy begins again. The Communists know that the young men were paid and once more shout of injustice and treachery. The head of the village, the old men, the fathers are denounced, the village 'excommunicated.' Meetings, confessions, torture, death—all return.

This fresh outburst of wickedness ends in a great demonstration of joy and shouts of praise in honour of the newly chosen *Tzü Tung Ping*. It is a swift change of scene, but the actors are always the same. The tragedy has ended, the comedy has begun. The rejoicings are like those for a wedding. There are as many palanquins as there are *Tzü Tung Ping*. They get in and are carried in triumph through the streets of the village. Everyone must be present. Little boys precede the palanquins screaming slogans provided by the *Kung-tso-yuan*. The rest of the people follow and are compelled to answer the shouts of the children by applauding and waving streamers of different colours. The *Kung-tso-yuan* directs the procession and watches those who have been 'corrected,' i.e. punished, during the meeting. They too must applaud, whatever they are suffering.

The families who have freely 'given' their sons receive a reward, an act of generosity that costs the Communists nothing, because the money must be collected and paid by the village itself. This sop the Communists present in public as if it were an act of disinterested love for their subjects.

So ends the so-called 'election of volunteers.'

## CHAPTER

# I4

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*19th November 1945*

YESTERDAY evening for the *n*th time the judge beat and sent away a Christian from Suiyeh who wanted to see us.

'It is the last time,' I said to myself and, without telling anyone, trembling with fear and rage, I went to see him.

'Is it true that yesterday evening you sent away a Christian from Suiyeh?'

'No,' he replied, his eyes shining with deceit, 'I was away all yesterday.'

'It must have been your soldiers.'

'I don't think so.'

The fear I had felt disappeared and, hardly disguising my anger, I said:

'You want a hospital and you begged me to help you when I did not want anything to do with it. I have more than once imperilled my servant's life so as to please you. The Christian who was beaten and sent away yesterday was bringing letters and surgical instruments for the hospital and you.' I could hear the excitement in my voice and I went on: 'It is unbearable, after all that you have made us suffer by imprisoning us, that we should be treated as malefactors.'

I got up and went away.

I was dripping with sweat, but I was happy. Sooner or later things would come to a head. I enjoyed watching the judge's manœuvring and defeating it by patience and procrastinating day after day. To-day the comedy reached its epilogue and I waited calmly for the next developments.

Towards evening the scoundrel arrived.

'But why are you so angry?' he asked me. 'The soldiers are ignorant. Do be patient.'

I almost enjoyed his lies and was pleased that I had got off so lightly.

When he left, the two Fathers asked me for an explanation. I told them the whole story and they were astonished. They pointed out to me the danger to which I had exposed myself and reproved me for my animosity towards the Communists. It would be better to reach a compromise so as to repair some of the damage that had been done. The compromise was to agree that not only I but they as well should go to the hospital.

Had the judge expected such an outcome?

*20th November*

Even the trouble of having hunted for a hiding-place had proved useless, for we now heard that Tzechow had fallen into Communist hands. Unfortunately the victory meant the triumph of the Communists in northern China. The story of the battle was a very tragic one.

The Communists allowed the Nationalists to cross the Chang River, then destroyed the bridge and pursued the enemy who, for fear of being caught in the open, flung themselves into the town. There was a terrible massacre. An enormous wave of men attacked, armed with hand-grenades and driven on by Communist soldiers. One wave succeeded another. Bullets mowed them down and they fell like locusts surprised by a hurricane.

'You have the cartridges, we have the men!' cried the Communists.  
'Surrender!'

The Nationalist aeroplanes arrived, but instead of bombing the Communists, they bombed their own troops. The climax was reached when the Nationalist generals began to quarrel among themselves. One of them, Kao Su-shuan, asked for an armistice and joined the Communists. The disaster could not have been more complete. The only remaining force was the 40th Army, which held out until its ammunition was exhausted and it was compelled to surrender. General Ma Fu-wu tried to escape, but was caught and taken prisoner. The soldiers fled and were captured or drowned trying to cross the river. According to reports, there were 400,000 dead, a number obviously exaggerated, but not, I think, very much.

*21st November*

The first *Min Ping* began to return. I wanted to ask them a great many questions, but first I had to go and visit the young man who had shot himself through the leg. I took my medical bag and set out.

Autumn was almost over and nature slept under the icy mantle of winter. I left the village and took the path that led to the hills. The dry penetrating air numbed my bones. The sun had no heat, but it had already risen over the crest of the mountains and filled the world with a crystal light shining from a cobalt sky. Here and there little boys, shivering in the morning breeze, were patiently following the solemn pace of the herds of bulls and cows with their smoking nostrils. The grazing was very poor and the cattle struggled for the tufts of grass that had not yet been destroyed by the frost. It was one of those rare days when the sight is clearer and the melody of nature seems nearer and more touching.

I climbed up the little path, still covered with hoar frost, passed a little hamlet and found myself confronted by a strange and solemn sight. Between the tops of the mountains there stood on the horizon a group of enormous statues that seemed to have been carved by some mysterious hand—the Flight of the Holy Family to Egypt. I saw St. Joseph with his sad and thoughtful head; the head of the camel with its two humps between which was seated the Virgin with the Child in her arms. Nature and time combined in this distant corner of the world, producing this charming group, a sight that one seldom sees because for the greater part of the year the clouds cover this holy relic like a veil. And so, passing mentally from century to century, from era to era, trying to imagine the age of those wonderful statues, I reached the village of Peimiao.

The wounded man was still feverish and his leg very swollen. There were several young men talking among themselves about the battle of Tzechow.

‘It was a great victory,’ I said.

Their ‘Yes’ sounded like a long sigh.

‘Sixteen set out from our village, four have come back,’ said one.

‘He is lucky who sees his family again,’ remarked another.

These staccato sentences, spoken with such an effort, made me think of the sobs that, during the last days, had choked the throats of so many poor families. Meanwhile the so-called ‘fathers of the people,’ the leaders of the new Communist world, wove their plots and enjoyed the rich booty that had cost the blood of so many victims.

*22nd November*

In the Communist community, where tyranny and insolence are elevated to the rank of virtues and vice is praised, it is difficult to find

good people. And when, as a result of some incident, there is a suspicion of ill-will, then tyranny masked by a pretence of defending the laws and combating oppression can cause very unpleasant situations.

I was sent for urgently to go and see the head of the chamber of commerce and the following incident took place when I was crossing the river.

As I put my foot on a stepping-stone, I heard a man's voice behind me scolding the boys who were on guard.

'Why have you allowed that European devil to pass? Stop him.'

I pretended not to understand and went on. The man shouted again and I suddenly found myself surrounded by a crowd of boys who looked at me in wonder. I patted the head of the nearest and said:

'Don't you know me any longer?'

But the man repeated the order for the third time: 'Stop him!'

I turned back and saw in front of me a figure who must be called a man because he made human sounds.

'Do you know who I am?' I asked him.

'No!'

'You have offended the doctor of your superiors.'

'You insolent fellow, you shan't pass.'

'If I am not to pass, someone must come and arrest me. Do what you like.'

And I sat down on the gravel. For a quarter of an hour nobody passed and then six *Min Ping*, called by one of the boys at the instigation of my captor, arrived. They made me get up and ordered me to follow them. The position was critical, but I felt safe because, under Communist law, it is an unforgivable crime to stop a doctor. The man's hatred must have been overwhelming to allow him to do such a dangerous thing.

Following the soldiers, I entered the village surrounded by a curious crowd. My captor sent for the heads of the village. In the interval the people and especially the women brought the children to look at me. I made friends with them, which created an atmosphere of goodwill, especially among the old women, who held forth about 'the stranger's goodness.'

The authorities arrived and set up a court of justice. The head, who knew me well, said: 'Who are you?'

'I am not Chinese as you can see. I am the doctor of your superiors. You have interfered with a doctor's work and cursed him. According to the law you must answer for this. And if, as a result of your crime,

the head of the chamber of commerce dies, you will be responsible.'

'Yes, I have cursed you and I curse you again,' said the creator of the incident.

He went on shouting and abusing me. I did not say a word.

'You won't live any longer,' he said, 'and you will pay once for all for the crimes you have committed in this country.'

Leaning against the wall, there was an enormous pickaxe belonging to a soldier. For a moment I relived the agonizing moments of the 21st September. In desperation, I jumped on to a little ruined wall and addressed the people:

'Very well, I will tell you my crimes. Who protected you during the Japanese occupation? How many of your babies have I saved? Who has treated you and cured you without asking for a penny? Who has taught your children? Who has saved you from the brigands?'

The head of the village came up to me, begged my pardon and asked me to leave.

'We shall meet again at the judge's,' said my aggressor, and went away.

Before reaching the corner of the road out of the village two soldiers ran after me and forced me to go back again. My aggressor stood with crossed arms and said:

'You shan't leave.'

'I shall not leave,' I replied, and sat down surrounded by a silent and surprised crowd.

Accustomed always to saying 'yes,' to being beaten and scourged, they could not believe that they were seeing a foreigner and a prisoner showing his teeth to this kind of devil.

'If you want to go,' one of the minor officials said to me, 'write a letter to the judge.'

'Certainly. Give me some paper and a brush.'

Meanwhile an officer whom I had cured a short time before arrived. He greeted me politely and asked what had happened. While I was talking to him, the man who had stopped me came back. The officer, having heard my story, turned to this creature and said:

'What have you been doing?'

The rogue realized that he was in the presence of his superior and, as if to defend himself, said:

'This stranger struck one of our boys.'

'I patted him,' I corrected.

But he would not give in and began to recite the laws, the orders of

Mao Tse-tung about boys, setting out the respect to be paid to them, the gravity of the crime of offending them, etc.

While he was holding forth, the answer to my letter arrived, but they did not show it to me. The officer made the orator stop and asked me to go home. I felt I was leaving a storm-centre. When I got to the judge's office, I went in and said to him:

'This is too much. If you don't find some way to stop it, you will be the doctor at the hospital.'

The two Fathers, who had heard what was happening, were waiting anxiously for me.

Shortly afterwards the judge arrived smiling and I repeated what I had said to him a short time before. His only answer was:

'You see the people still don't know you. They are uneducated, ignorant, and you must pity them.'

'No, it is not the people. They trust me. It is your Communist commissars. I want amends made to me.'

'Don't be afraid. To-morrow I will go to that village and deal with the man who has offended you.'

If he had been sincere he would have said: 'Why didn't they bury you alive, or throw you into the river?'

Dog does not eat dog.

23rd November

Despite their great victory at Tzechow, there were rumours of a Communist set-back. A column of Nationalists was moving from south to east in the direction of Linhsien. Hopes and fears returned. We went out in search of news. The judge had already sent away his wife and his most valuable possessions, which was very significant. Even *La Moresina* came to tell me with a mysterious air that she had heard that a large number of soldiers were advancing. She asked if I knew anything and if they were good or bad soldiers. What would we do and what ought she to do?

There were rumours that everyone would have to leave, only soldiers remaining in the village. Even little 'Ching Chiao,' not quite cured of her abscess, came to see me, accompanied by her grandmother. The panic and the gossip were unfortunately confirmed by a visit from the judge.

'Our enemies are on the move and have occupied Suiyeh. We do not know yet what they are planning. It will be difficult for them to get here, for there are many obstacles in their way. If somebody comes

and knocks at the door to-night, don't be frightened. It will be one of my soldiers to warn you to fly. Meanwhile collect the medicines and your belongings.'

What should we do? Escape before night? Stay? Hide ourselves? And if, as the judge said, they could not reach this village? Most unfortunately I had not seen a Christian all day. Perhaps they had arranged to come for us at nightfall? We were so bewildered that not one of us was able to decide what to do. I personally would have left, but the other two? Should I leave them at the mercy of the Communists? I tried to be calm, thinking that if the situation got worse the Christians would not fail to come and fetch us. We spent a miserable evening. Two soldiers packed the medicines in wooden boxes. The judge came to see that everything was ready.

At last we were alone. It was late. Should we go to sleep or await events? Habit was too strong and what was once so pleasant and now so irksome made us throw ourselves on our pallet. . . . The mind wandered. Imagination triumphed. Every sound seemed suspicious: a little rustle, the cry of a night bird, even our own breathing, were frightening.

Midnight came and went, Nothing had happened. The restless mind seemed resentful, disturbed by this oppressive eternal waiting. So from one qualm to another until tiredness overcame our troubled souls. The mind became confused, imagination became more vivid, reasoning powers became vague and disappeared, and an uneasy and heavy sleep put an end to our anxieties.

#### *24th November*

Waking after a troubled night is not pleasant. The mind is reluctant to resume its burdens. The indefinable oppression of the previous day, which still lingers, is changed into an overwhelming desire to recover something interesting, something of value, which it seems to have lost. But this twilight of the mind disappeared as consciousness of our situation returned and we once more recognized the place that had witnessed our sufferings of the previous night. Nobody had come and knocked at our door. We were still on our bed, shut in by the same walls, but all this did not make us believe that the danger was over.

As soon as possible, we went out in search of news, but no one knew anything definite. The judge had left very early in the morning, but the people did not know where he had gone. The day passed between hope and fear.

Towards evening the judge reappeared and relieved our anxiety.

'Well?' I enquired.

'Well, the hospital is ready, It is only necessary to decide where you want the operating-theatre. To-morrow we will go and settle that.'

'So it is not necessary to escape?' I asked him, smiling.

'No, there does not seem to be any danger.'

And he went away, very busy. As soon as he had gone, *La Moresina* came to ask for news. She, too, was surprised.

'But it appears they are not very far from here,' she said very quietly.

While we were talking, the servant arrived from Changte with empty hands, as we had arranged, but with many letters. The news was not very encouraging. The Fathers feared that the town would fall into the hands of the Communists any day and the servant had been sent back to beg us to intervene with the Communist authorities to try to save the church if the place were attacked. We were condemned to find ourselves on the edge of one precipice after another and the scales might precipitate us into the abyss at any moment. Now there was the added anxiety for our fellow missionaries and their appeal for help.

After supper, protected by the darkness, I helped *La Moresina* to bury corn and beans.

25th November

We baked our underclothes, the only way to get rid of the loathsome insects. The cold seemed to have induced all the Communists' lice and bugs to take refuge with us. It was an interesting occupation and took us the whole morning. About midday the Christians arrived with not only wood, but also exciting news. They said that the day of liberation was drawing near. Everyone declared that the Nationalists were advancing from north, south, east and west, carrying all before them. We had to perform feats of mental acrobatics to keep up with the contradictory news that arrived every day and seemed designed to undermine our minds and bodies. It was a struggle different from that of arguing with the Communists, but no less exasperating.

To-day, too, we had trouble with the judge. A few days before, a Christian of Tienchiaching saw a little boil on his head and had it lanced by a barber, with the result that he was poisoned. The poor man's head and face swelled up to such an extent that he could neither eat nor speak. Now there was the question of obtaining a permit for

me to go and see him. The Christians went to the judge, but returned very crestfallen, having been driven away with abuse and insults.

'That European is not capable of treating the man and the judge is away.'

The usual lies. I went in search of the secretary. The judge was not away, but was out in the country; I sent the Christians to look for him and to tell him that I wished to visit the sick man. They came back in about half an hour as down-hearted as before. The judge had pretended not to notice them until, bored by their insistence he had said:

'Go away and woe to you if you take the European to see the sick man.'

After dinner there came another invitation to visit the hospital with the judge. It was the second time and I was in just the same frame of mind as on the first occasion. On the way, the judge complained that the servant had returned without bringing any medicines.

'So much the better,' I replied, 'as in a few days even Changte will be in your hands.'

Everything was ready, but I did not succeed in finding a place for the operating-theatre.

'Where do you want it?' the judge enquired.

I pointed to a garden outside the hospital grounds, hoping that respect for private property would act as a brake on his evil plans.

'Give me the dimensions,' he said crossly, 'and to-morrow they shall begin the building.'

A despot's orders—and who can refuse to do this work? It seemed very appropriate that the approval of the chief of police was also necessary. I had not seen him since the day he turned me out when I went to him about the two Christian girls. Our meeting was icy.

'How are you?' I said, more as a matter of habit than from kindness.

'You cured the swellings on my feet. Now they have appeared on my head.'

'You ought to have it cut off and sent to Putihsiaochuang. I will put it right for you in a day.'

The joke went home. Without saying a word he gave me a furious glance that wiped the smile from my face. In the course of their work, the trainers of wild beasts must have felt as I did at that moment. Putting one's head into the lion's mouth for the amusement of the public means that sooner or later it is bitten off by the terrible teeth

of the king of beasts. I was following the same road and I feared that I should come to the same end.

26th November

The man who was so ill yesterday was brought from Tienchiaching by about twenty young men.

'We were ready,' they told me, 'even to commit a crime if they had tried to stop us.'

I examined the patient. His face and head were swollen until they were a shapeless mass, his eyes had disappeared, his nose could hardly be seen and his mouth looked horrible. I wondered he had not died on the way. His daughter was in despair. Father Perottoni administered extreme unction. I gave him two injections and ordered immediate hot fomentations of sulphate of magnesia. *La Moresina* gave a room for him. We hoped that he would become sufficiently conscious to receive the viaticum. All the Christians who had brought him were his relatives; I asked them to make their confessions and to-morrow morning to make their communion with intention for him.

The news of the arrival of this patient had spread and everyone wanted to see him; very few resisting the opportunity to see such a terrible sight. The judge came and had to submit to a sermon from the Christians on the death of a good man and a wicked man.

I was summoned by the head of the chamber of commerce, and said to him as soon as I arrived:

'When you need me, always send one of your soldiers, because I do not want a repetition of what happened at the river the other day.'

He answered me as he had never answered me before.

'I too shall finish this cursed life there.'

This man, who had tried so hard to stifle the dictates of conscience by means of a depraved philosophy, would never succeed in evading a terrible and just remorse. The soul, crushed under an unbearable and unnatural load, inevitably rebels. Its lamentations cannot be stifled by fresh crimes, and the attempt will lead to nothing but greater misery. The limits of nature cannot be ignored with impunity.

'These inexplicable torments and what seem to you insoluble problems,' I said, trying to comfort him, 'may serve to lead you not to despair, but to a healthy revolt against your own conduct.'

He listened to me attentively and silently, but his spirit was in no state to react.

'I will come again to-morrow,' I said.

'Thank you. I shall expect you.'

I left him feeling almost remorseful at having reproved him so severely.

*27th November*

The injections I had given my patient had had their effect. By four o'clock in the morning, he was able to open his eyes and the night passed between hope and fear. It would be two or three days before it would be possible to be certain that he would live. After Mass the viaticum was carried to him. The Christians took part in the ceremony with great devotion, and his daughter, with moving piety, suggested holy thoughts to her father. Two tears forced their way from his swollen eyes and a hardly perceptible smile appeared on his swollen lips. This fact, and the exaggerated optimism of the Christians about the improvement in his condition, gave rise to several incidents.

In the village there were two or three commissars who had arrived from no one knew where. They came to see us and the patient. I was accustomed to suspicion and malevolence, and they said to me:

'If you have managed to cure your Christian, why can't you cure our people? You work when and how you like and from bad motives. Even your Christian must be under the power of some occult witchcraft of yours.'

I thought it useless to answer, and I smiled. But the situation was made worse by the commissars' attempts to stir up bad feeling against us among the villagers.

Towards evening two men arrived to demand explanations of my work. After questioning the Christians and the servant, their verdict was that I and the Christians were sorcerers, wizards; that I cured only Christians and despised the Communists. The discussion became so heated that we were afraid of some ugly occurrence and sent away all the Christians except the patient's daughter, who remained with him while I went to inform the judge, who replied very seriously:

'Examine your own conscience.'

I bowed my head for a moment and then said:

'I cannot find any reason why I should be condemned. The people came freely. Why cannot my Christian remain?'

Later I wrote: 'His invitation that I should examine my conscience seems providential, even though it comes from his mouth. Reviewing my life year by year, I cannot find anything with which to reproach myself, still less for self-condemnation. I shall close my eyes in this lost

corner of the world. What does it matter if he who is with me at the last moment is not a friend, but a murderer? I thought again of the 21st September and saw it as a tragic interlude. . . . Now the comedy has reached its epilogue and I must take part in the last scene. I pray God to help me and to hide my weakness under the omnipotence of His strength.'

*28th November*

I went with Father Monti to see the soldier with the wounded leg setting out with my heart in my mouth after what had happened the day before. A little joke is so easy in those mountain gorges. But we got back safely, thanks be to God. Tied to a tree outside our door was a big horse with two soldiers sitting beside him. At our appearance one said to the other, 'Here he is,' and went away.

When we entered the house, the servant said to me:

'Those soldiers came to look for you.'

'What did they say?'

'Nothing. They wanted to see you.'

Never during my many months in prison was I a prey to such terror. I felt faint and sat down to wait, overwhelmed by physical and moral weakness.

Three soldiers appeared.

'Where is the doctor?' one asked politely.

'Here I am,' I said, rising.

'Our captain is ill and he asks you to go to him to-day. His horse is waiting for you outside.'

Scenting a trick, I asked for details of the illness. They told me that he had been ill for a month and that the doctor at Linchi had diagnosed typhus and malaria, but had not succeeded in curing him. I took my medical outfit and went out with the soldiers. I tried to mount the horse. After doing my best and slipping off right and left, I finally succeeded in settling myself in the saddle. Father Monti was there to see us off, as were also a crowd of villagers, all convulsed with laughter at the sight of me on horseback.

My military escort had now increased to six, one of them the officer who had helped me a few days previously at the river. He said to me:

'You remember that scoundrel who stopped you a few days ago? Rest assured that he has been treated as he deserved.'

These few words put an end to my fears; I was not being led forth to my death.

The servant accompanying us, we took the road to the mountains. The day was cold and a thin fog covered the countryside and the mountains. In the villages through which we passed, the inhabitants were amazed to see me riding a horse and with an escort of soldiers. Among them was one where lived the head of the zone, and there the curiosity took the form of curses. Some of the people swore at me, others asking what I was doing and why I had not been cut in half. My escort defended me by arguments not very philosophical, but extremely efficacious.

We stopped at a Chinese hotel for some food and while I was eating, surrounded by an inquisitive crowd, a youth appeared wrapped up in a long black goat-skin. He offered me a cigarette and said:

‘Shenfu, p’ing-an.’ (‘Father, peace be with you.’)

It was a purely Christian form of greeting practically unknown to the pagans, but well understood by both of us. Without giving myself away, I tried to exchange some words with him:

‘Be here to-morrow or the day after and we will have a talk. Now I must go to Linchi to cure the captain.’

I said these last words in a loud voice so that everybody could hear. The men, wrapped up in goat-skins of different colours, their faces shrivelled with cold, plied the servant with questions about me and congratulated him on having such an illustrious acquaintance.

In the evening we arrived at our destination and I saw my patient. His illness had already been diagnosed by the other doctor, so I merely asked him some questions. He complained of not being able to sleep, so I gave him an injection of morphine and left him.

While I was waiting for supper, two officers came in. I suppose they did not know that I spoke Chinese, for I heard one say in a loud voice:

‘This is the European doctor whom the judge wants at all costs for his hospital. But that fool will have to reckon with us. This foreigner must be in our hands.’

The words were explicit and alarming, opening up another unknown prospect before me. If they wanted to have me, I should have to go with them to some unknown destination.

*29th November*

I slept in a Communist bed—woollen mattress, two silk quilts, sheets with a comforting smell of having been washed. I slept very well, notwithstanding the new surroundings and the emotions of the day before. I woke at dawn and visited the patient. He was very

cheerful because he had had a good night, and the crisis of his illness was obviously over. I gave him another injection of morphine. The Communist doctor who had been looking after him for more than a month had been dismissed as incompetent and I figured as the unworthy usurper of the honour of another. I tried to repair this injustice, but the captain said:

'No, no, that doctor is a fraud.'

My protests were sincere, but had no effect. The Chinese world is like that!

They wanted me to stay for several days and I had great difficulty in getting away. Had I stayed for another hour, it might have been fatal to me. If they wanted me, it would be better for them to see me in the presence of the judge.

My return was not so impressive as my outward journey. I had only one soldier as an escort, and he had some trouble when we were passing through the villages, for at intervals he had to kick children to get rid of them. We stopped in the village where I had seen the Christian on the previous day. He was there again and I was able to talk freely to him. A considerable number of people gathered round and wanted me to treat them. We left about two o'clock.

Our goal was still a long way off and the day was short. I urged the horse on and touched him with a spur—evidently in a vital spot, for he set off at full gallop. I fell on his neck and clutched it frantically, but an unexpected corner and a sudden swerve by the horse unseated me and I landed between two rocks, getting up with a bleeding hand.

I got home at sunset. My visit to the captain had made the people forget for the moment the hatred stirred up by the commissars. My companions asked me a great many questions. I told them the whole story, touching but lightly on what the two officers had said.

### *30th November*

The last day of November. We had been in prison for five months, and had spent this time like men suffering from a dangerous illness, alternating between hope and fear. How much had happened and how many atrocities had we seen! The hope of liberty had been dangled before our eyes, but alas! it had proved only a dream. We had lived through some very dangerous moments. The quarrels with the judge, especially during the last month, had been such as not to give us much hope of better days. Very soon I should have to go to the hospital. What would happen to my companions? And if those

officers wanted me as a doctor in the army? In the midst of my misfortunes, perhaps it had been a good thing that I had been compelled to act the part of a doctor; it was an occupation that distracted my mind and, so to speak, took me out of myself.

A relative of the sick Christian at Tienchiaching arrived. Everyone in that village wanted to ask the judge to allow us to go there for the Festival of the Immaculate Conception—that was, to get us into worse difficulties. But the Christian insisted, used so many arguments, and showed such faith in the possibility of such an undertaking, that our initial resistance was overcome.

It was night. The cold was intense, and there was an icy wind while we were discussing how to get permission. The few Christians present listened as if they understood what we were saying and advised us on the best way to set about it. The discussion went on and nobody wanted to go to bed, for the cold in our hovel was so cruel.

### *1st December*

I was away practically all day; in the morning with the wounded soldier, then at Hochien, and in the afternoon with the head of the chamber of commerce. The depression of five months in prison and, even more, the hope that this man could help us to obtain our freedom, made me ask him some rather dangerous questions. He listened with interest and then he said:

'I think that in a few days you will be taken to the hospital and the other two Fathers will be sent to the mandarin's headquarters at Shanchuang. Even the judge will be transferred there.'

'And when shall we be liberated?'

'That is a very delicate matter. You will be there for some time, and even I have no idea what the chiefs intend to do with you.'

If he was speaking the truth, our future was very uncertain and sombre. We should be more closely guarded and looked upon with still greater suspicion, especially the two Fathers at Shanchuang. Christians were not allowed to set foot in that village, the mountain stronghold of the heads of the province.

I went home in very bad spirits; even if the man had not really believed what he told me, it seemed that our last day was near. For anyone who complained, there was nothing but the gallows. But the desire to know, to find out, gave me no peace. I did not say a word of this to my companions, for, I must confess, I did not feel much confidence in their courage.

My sick Christian was improving. The swelling had decreased and through the layers of dead skin one could see his face.

*2nd December*

With the punctuality of the rising sun, the judge came at eight o'clock to bring us the good news.

'In a day or two now, you will be transferred to the hospital.'

He invited us all three to go and see it. We listened humbly to his words, but he would have to pay for our goodwill by letting us go to Tienchiaching. When the conversation was coming to an end, Father Perottoni made the request.

'The eighth of December is a great religious festival for us and we should like to spend it at Tienchiaching.'

'I have nothing against it,' replied the judge.

We had heard this stiff answer many times from that mouth and the lie had always disguised a categorical refusal. He saw what a bad impression he had made and immediately corrected himself.

'I will speak to the mandarin to-day or will write to him to-morrow. I hope that there will not be any objection.'

Yes, he would write and perhaps ask that I should be transferred to the hospital even sooner. If the answer arrived next day, our request would go up in smoke.

After dinner we went to the hospital as we had promised. The Chinese medical ward had been open for about a month, the dispenser being a Christian prisoner. Two Chinese doctors worked in the left wing of the building.

'Choose your room,' said the judge.

There was not much choice; it was difficult to find a room with accommodation for all of us, so I said to the judge:

'This place isn't bad, but the rooms are too small for the three of us.'

The judge looked embarrassed.

'For the moment, look for somewhere for yourself. We will arrange about the others later.'

'No,' I answered coldly; 'if I must come here, I want the other two to come with me.'

This time the hypocrite drew in his horns:

'I will make arrangements for them too.'

And he left us. We took advantage of the opportunity to pay a visit to the head of the chamber of commerce. He welcomed us cordially

and insisted that we should stay to dinner. My companions refused and I pleaded that I had to visit a patient. As Father Perottoni had suggested, I asked him if it would be possible for us to go to Tienchiaching for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

'I will speak to the mandarin about it,' he said.

'Is he at home?'

'Yes, I am sure he is not away at the moment.'

A detail of great importance.

There were four dismal drum-beats calling the people together.

We went home accompanied by a soldier of the head's, crossing the frozen river and taking the usual path towards the open country, and walking slowly despite the coldness of our feet.

That evening, or at the latest to-morrow, perhaps we should have leave to go to Tienchiaching. We waited till late, but the judge did not come.

### *3rd December*

More scheming and therefore more questions to keep the imagination busy. I went with Father Monti to visit the wounded soldier, and on the way explained my plans.

'We must do everything possible to ensure your return to Suiyeh. I shall stay at the hospital only on the condition that they allow me to have a Christian from Hsikan as a servant. He must be someone who knows these parts well, is educated, and knows what to do. When I am sure that you have arrived at Suiyeh, I shall make some excuse to leave the hospital with the servant and shall escape.'

'Do you want to repeat the failure of July?' Father Monti replied.

We discussed the plan at home. If they would not give us permission to go to Tienchiaching, how could we hope that we should be able to return to Suiyeh? The afternoon passed sadly, no one saying a word.

The light faded, but still there was no sign of the judge. During the evening we had another discussion, which, due to me, ended in a little quarrel. Because the months had passed without our knowing what our fate was to be, I wanted to put an end to this uncertainty and to force the Communists to give a clear and definite explanation of our position, whatever the consequences might be. It was true that we had asked for such an explanation several times, but always very politely. My two companions disagreed with me because they feared that it might be disastrous for us and the Christians. I explained that I would go to the judge by myself and take complete responsibility.

I went into the courtyard plunged in thought. The night was calm and bitterly cold.

*4th December*

After a night of prayer and reflection, of doubts and decisions, I celebrated Mass and, with the feeling that I was going to my death, collected my ideas for the last time. I thought again of the gravity of the situation, of the words to be said and, stroking my beard as if to free myself from the nightmare that oppressed me, I prepared to start.

'Wait,' said Father Perottoni. 'We are coming with you.'

These words made me live again, but only for a moment. I felt like a drowning man with the water in his throat.

'Make haste,' I said mechanically.

We left our prison. Every step rang in my head like a threat.

We walked straight in to see the judge without waiting to be announced. He received us coldly:

'Sit down. What do you want?'

At a moment when such grave matters were to be decided, it seemed to me to be dangerous to sit down; it would make it more difficult to leave and I preferred to remain standing by the door.

'I alone am responsible for what I am going to say to you, so I alone must accept the consequences. Tell me: are we free or not?'

'Yes,' he replied.

'What does freedom mean? I still cannot understand. In my opinion, freedom means that others shall not interfere with one's actions. I have been here for five months and I have had to do what you wanted. You have taken me from house to house. There is always a soldier at my side. I cannot see the Christians. You have had them beaten, threatened, abused—and blame the ignorance of your soldiers. Freedom! I have always worked for you and you continue to tighten the bonds of oppression. We have asked you many times for permission to go among the Christians and you have not allowed it. Two days ago we asked for permission to go to Tienchiaching and you practically refused. As for the hospital, you said it should be ours and instead it has become yours. You told me that everyone was free to come and see me, but when the patients are Christians, you send them away roughly. Very shortly you are taking me to the hospital. I agree on three conditions: first, you must give me a document saying that I am free to leave when I want to; secondly, that the Christians are absolutely free to come and see me; thirdly, that these two Fathers can

return to Suiyeh. If any of these conditions are not carried out I shall not go to the hospital.'

What I said was very confused and he tried to interrupt me several times, but I would not allow him. When I had finished, Father Perottoni spoke even more strongly. The judge found himself between two fires and could not defend himself—indeed, he frequently nodded in agreement. Finally Father Perottoni said:

'You have imprisoned us because we are priests of the Catholic Church and because you want to murder us. Very well, we are ready.'

It seemed to me that the judge was trembling, but I did not know if it was with shame or rage. After a few moments silence, he tried to find an excuse:

'I am not responsible. I have to obey orders.'

'Then,' I replied, 'we will go this very day to see the mandarin.'

We went away without saying good-bye.

This outburst seemed to free us from our previous alarm and confirmed our determination to go and see the mandarin. We decided to put it off till the next day because we were too agitated at the moment.

The day passed in thinking over what we had said and deciding what we should say to the mandarin. For fear of some ugly trick during the night, we sent home the Christian, who was now cured, so there were only we three and the servant. After two sleepless nights and the emotions of the morning, I dropped off at once and slept soundly.

### *5th December*

Two Christians arrived very early to ask the result of our request. We did not think it wise to say what had occurred, so replied that it would be very difficult to get permission and sent them away for fear something might happen.

In the afternoon, accompanied by a soldier, we went to see the mandarin. It was difficult to force an entry into those mysterious and abominable labyrinths. The mandarin's house was not the same one as he had occupied five months before. Communist chiefs are always afraid of being attacked, so they change their quarters from time to time, and very few of the *élite* know where they are actually living. The sentry at the gate does not know if he is guarding the mandarin or someone else.

We were stopped by the sentry. He took the soldier with him and disappeared, which was not very polite; meaning, perhaps, that we

might not see the mandarin. Without great difficulty, and ignoring the danger, we went into a room opposite, where two men sat at a table. One looked at us, sent away a soldier and asked us what we wanted.

'We wish to see the mandarin.'

'He is not here,' he replied.

'Then his secretary.'

A few minutes later, we were in the presence of the mandarin's secretary, who had with him an important member of the central Communist government. To our great surprise the secretary showed considerable reluctance to speak and referred all our questions to the government representative, who must have been a very high official. He encouraged us to say what we liked and we saw him tremble when we enumerated our grievances.

'Why are we prisoners?' I said, turning to the secretary. 'Why are we not allowed to visit our Christians?'

He tried to make himself as small as possible and did not answer. The other man said to him:

'Tell the mandarin to release these prisoners immediately.'

'He is not at home.'

'Where is he?'

'At ...'

'Telephone to him.'

'The telephone is broken.'

'Telephone to the central government in my name.'

The secretary, who, because of his wickedness, had been declared to be a model citizen by the local chiefs, and a tiger by the people, moved towards the telephone and, without touching it, came back and said:

'It is not possible to telephone to the government offices.'

'Write a letter to the mandarin.' He turned to us. 'You shall have your permit to-morrow.'

Our joy was indescribable. He asked us some questions and then dismissed us, saying:

'As soon as you have time, come and see me.'

It was a complete triumph. We went away wanting to tell the whole world of our happiness. Even the jeers and rude remarks of the soldiers we met seemed like caresses. The judge and his worthy companion, the mandarin, were to be treated as they deserved.

We waited to see what would happen next.

*6th December*

Yesterday's meeting gave us new life. At an early hour Father Perottoni and Father Monti set out for the meeting-place at the cross-roads to wait for the Christians and tell them the good news. We spent the day in our preparations, and, as evening approached, waited anxiously for our permit. Five o'clock, six, seven came and went without any news, without any sign of a messenger. Had we been deceived again? Had that official of the central government been playing a cruel game with us? Had it been a fairy tale invented by those two bloodhounds to increase our suffering by tricking us? But the unknown man had spoken with such sincerity. We were overwhelmed by a greater bitterness than we had ever known before, so terrible was it to find ourselves robbed of a joy so hardly won.

*7th December*

The permit had not arrived, so we told the Christians to come and spend the Festival with us. Some had already arrived from Suiyeh. Just as it was getting dark, I saw the judge's secretary approaching:

'I have something very important to tell you.'

I made a sign to the Christians who were present to go outside and invited him to sit down.

'The judge has sent me with this communication received from the mandarin.'

I opened it and read: 'I must apologize to my foreign friends for what they have suffered from us, and I am happy to grant the permit for which they asked.' It was signed by the mandarin.

But it had arrived too late for us to reach Tienchiaching for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

I told the Christians at once and sent them to call the Fathers, who had gone out to recite the breviary. Meanwhile the judge arrived.

'Have you read the note I sent you?' he asked us.

'Yes, thank you.'

He tried to apologize, but could not find any words.

Night fell and the Christians, in successive waves, came down from the mountains full of joy. They had started without permission, not knowing if they were running into danger.

Urged on by an ideal that is certainly not that of Communism, it seemed impossible to them that they were able, after so many years, to lift up their heads a little. Alas! it would be for only a very short time.

*8th December*

The great day had arrived, the great Festival prepared for amid so many hopes and fears. The Christians prayed and sang with all their hearts. The voices silent for so long now rose in triumph. The courtyard was full of curious people who were amazed that such things could happen under Communist rule.

'And they say that religion has been destroyed,' they remarked.  
'It would need something more to destroy the Catholic Church.'

Some soldiers on the surrounding wall aimed their rifles at us, but their threats and curses were drowned by the hymns of the Christians. After Mass, in accordance with Chinese custom, we exchanged good wishes. Those present received our blessing and then dispersed to their villages. By the evening, only those from Suiyeh were left.

## CHAPTER

# 15

*9th December 1945*

**W**HAT had happened during these last days made us hope that at least Father Perottoni and Father Monti would be released. Should this be so, even if I were not freed I should be able to escape.

No Communists disturbed us that day.

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Of the many organizations (I wrote) created by the Communists to keep the people in a state of ferment, the *Nung Min Hui*—the Peasants' Association—shows the most surprising and brutal activity. Its title should not suggest to the reader's mind that all the cultivators of the soil have their duties and their rights. The Communist law on the subject is clear and praiseworthy, being based on Sun Yat-sen's<sup>1</sup> principle that 'the land must belong to the man who cultivates it.' Profiting by the laziness and often the injustice of Chang Kai-shek's government about so fundamental a problem as land reform, Communism has created for itself a powerful weapon for infiltration and victory. Apart from the disgusting brutalities that I have emphasized, the promise of a fair and equal distribution of the land aroused enthusiasm among the Chinese people—at least at the beginning.

The life and death of Communism in China depends on its handling of this vital problem and the Communist ideology would triumph if it were not belied by the conduct of its exponents. Nobody knows what the future will bring, but in the opinion of the people, and judging by what one sees every day, Communism has no intention of abandoning or reducing the use of terrorism as a weapon. Everybody must recognize the existence of the Peasants' Association and everyone must belong to it, but no one knows its aims or who is at its head. I

<sup>1</sup> Founder and first president of the Chinese Republic.

have asked for information about it several times and the usual answer is: 'We don't understand anything about it.'

The people find themselves alternately extolled and abused. Anyone who has given a son to the Army, or whose son or daughter is a People's Commissar, or who can claim some special meritorious action, is immediately the object of Communist generosity and is given land. In the beginning of the occupation, when people were still dominated by fear and the Communists wished to be popular—or, at least, not to be feared—land and grain were distributed with a liberality and a generosity never seen before. But those who received these lavish presents were taught to understand that, in one way or another, they would be compelled to pay for them.

When the Communists conquer new territory, the majority of the population flee—some because they know they have committed crimes, others because they are rich and so regarded as evildoers, but the greatest number because they are afraid. This enormous exodus has disastrous consequences—the fields are not cultivated. In many villages, to prevent the harvest being lost, the soldiers have forced the remainder of the people to cut the millet and the corn and hand them over to the authorities.

To obviate this danger, the Communists have created the *Nung Min Hui*, thereby achieving two objectives—the inauguration of agrarian reform, and, by promising them land, popularity with those who have not fled. To this second part of the Communists' game, there is no end. The land divided is generally of very poor quality, the remainder being a useful bait to lure back the fugitives:

'We do not want to take anyone's land. If those who have run away wish to return, they will find their farms waiting for them.'

The news spreads and reaches the ears of the people concerned. Many are unhappy in exile and, feeling reassured, they come back, and are astonished to find that the Communists keep their promises. Gradually the village is repopulated and an unexpected calm reigns, the only reproach uttered being:

'We know you fled because you were afraid. Cultivate your land and nobody will interfere with you.' Everything seems to be forgotten and life becomes normal again. 'It is the moment,' say the Chinese, 'when the polecat lies in ambush and waits patiently for the chicken.'

The heads of the Peasants' Association are chosen by the Communists, and the tragic-comedy begins with their selection. In all the villages, the poorest man must be the head. That is not strange, but he must have

another qualification; he must be not only poor, but also ignorant and foolish, which automatically fits him to become a privileged person. It is very easy to understand the reason for this: the Communists will be free to do what they like, for it will be very difficult for a man of that type to grasp their programme. But the Communists are past-masters at putting ideas into even the thickest heads, so a few basic slogans are repeated over and over again until the machine is set in motion and rolls forward under Communist pressure, crushing every obstacle in its path. It is frightening when a community is governed by an imbecile.

The head is helped in his work by subordinates chosen by the people. They do not enjoy any authority and change their opinions in accordance with the whims of their leader. They always remind me of the articles that agree with the nouns they precede.<sup>1</sup> The noun is masculine? the article will be masculine. The noun is feminine? the article will be feminine. The problem for such puppets consists in guessing what their chief is thinking and in trying to please him in order to avoid irreparable public and personal disasters. They inspire pity. They have been forced to adopt a career that they never desired, and to resign is an unforgivable crime. Often at a People's Court held to settle agrarian matters, these underlings endeavour to restrain the unwise ferocity of their chief by making him wonder whether he is really carrying out the wishes of the men at the top. It is a perilous move. What terrible moments! I see before my mind's eye those thin, worried faces of the parties concerned with their strained expressions; those half-opened mouths fixed either in a stupid smile or about to utter the desperate cry of one who receives his condemnation; those eyes burning with hate; those meaningless words or, if they have a meaning, that are said with a painful stammer. Perhaps in a corner of the threshing-floor or on the stage some bloodstained victim is moaning while the people look on horrified.

'Someone,' urge the chief's subordinates, 'must go to ask for instructions.'

They know that any complaint to the *Kung-tso-yuan* will do no good, or may even make things worse, yet the hope that a delay will influence the decision of their chief makes them imprudent. He hesitates, then decides to take their advice. One of them detaches himself from the group, leaves the village and, half staggering, goes to the place where

<sup>1</sup> In Italian all articles agree in gender and number with the nouns. (Translator's note.)

the triumphant man who is responsible for what is happening receives him with suspicion and scorn and sends him back loaded with threats.

It may happen (as, in fact, it has on more than one occasion) that the messenger returns with an order to suspend the proceedings until the *Kung-tso-yuan* arrives. When he reaches the village, he asks why the Court is not at work and the sentence on the victim has not been carried out. There are attempts at explanation, then the Commissar enquires:

‘What injustice has been committed in the division of the land?’

Notice the evil unilateral form of the sentence. The Chinese phrase, ‘*Yu shen mo pu tui?*<sup>1</sup>’ is a bitter reproof and paralyses any attempt at defence that the other members of the Association would have liked to make.

The shrewd Commissar knows that if he were to show the slightest sense of justice or desire to listen to witnesses, he would be overwhelmed. Not that he fears the people; he despises them. His task is to fish in troubled waters, to get rid of anyone who is not a supporter of the head or who opposes him.

The poor people at the meeting are between the upper and the nether millstones; to express their real opinion on the work of the head is equivalent to saying that the Communists are criminals—which should not even be thought, much less said. And it is not said. The silence appears to condone the head’s conduct, so why has a messenger been sent? The *Kung-tso-yuan*, who thoroughly understands their mental suffering, ignores the people’s first reaction so as to deal with the second. He repeats his question, twice, thrice. All are silent; there is death in their hearts.

‘If you won’t speak,’ he says, ‘it means that you are mistaken, that your minds are not yet open, that you think as you did in the old days. You are traitors!’

The rebuke is followed by *t’an-pai t’an-pai* and the punishment of the ‘guilty.’

If the members of the Association agree with the head, the position is still more tragic. No messenger is sent to enquire ‘if the will of the little head is the same as the will of the big heads,’ and the sentence is carried out with terrifying brutality.

Among the few ideas that the Communists implant in the minds of the ignorant heads of the Association, there are three that take root and become the sources of action in these noble representatives of the

<sup>1</sup> ‘What is there that is incorrect?’

Communist evil way of life: 'Chien-t'ao' ('Investigate,' i.e. People's Courts); 'Ta tao lao ts'ai' ('Strike down the rich'); and 'Fa lan to' ('Punish the lazy'). These guiding principles are put into force with an efficiency and ability worthy of a better cause. It seems impossible that a man who is so ignorant of everything that is good can be so tenacious and crafty a worker in everything that is evil. I have had the opportunity to come into contact with some of the heads of the Peasants' Association; I have been frightened and astonished at their loquacity and their determination to defend these principles and the cruelty with which they put them into force.

The People's Courts are the pivots of the whole movement. It is of the utmost importance that the heads should understand this new and strange way of administering justice in their own interest. As the *Nung Min Hui* is one of the most important organizations, it is important to choose men who, as far as possible, are obedient to the wishes of those in command, and who will act when necessary without scruple. If they do not understand the reasons why the Courts are held, these reasons are driven into them by recourse to the lash, which is used without mercy. The object of such savage teaching is explained by the fact that Communism regards humanity as a mass of raw material to be shaped to any form, a principle I have pointed out many times.

With the success of the first phase, the second follows. During this the pupil is taught to admire and appreciate the great privilege he enjoys in being the head of the village. This lesson is very easy to learn, but the whole world must also understand it in the way and within the limits laid down by the chiefs. 'The mind begins to open' and the cunning masters profit by this as leading on to the second point in the programme—'Ta tao lao ts'ai.'

'What do you think of a fellow citizen of yours who has spent his life owning so much land, enjoying so many ways of amusing himself, and despising others?'

'Lao t'sai.'<sup>1</sup>

'And does it seem fair to you?'

'No, it is unfair.'

'And how will you behave in the face of such injustice?'

'Chien-t'ao.'

'What would you do to a person who, having so much land, has made others work for him and has not given them fair wages?'

'Ta tao lao ts'ai.'

<sup>1</sup> Literally, 'Old wealth.'

'And if a man has worked all his life and one fine day finds himself dismissed by his master?'

'Ta tao lao ts'ai.'

This answer is repeated like a refrain in the mind of the pupil, even when he is asleep. It is far from being an expression of agreement; it becomes rather a magic formula, which he repeats involuntarily to avoid being beaten. The Chinese, face to face with a rich man, behaves like a good fellow and if he could answer the Communist freely, he would say:

'The rich man is lucky to have so much land. I envy him, but it is just his good fortune.'

This is the point of view that must be destroyed—eradicated from the minds of the people. The Communists know that, to be successful, their revolution must adopt more ruthless measures.

With this object in view, every possible means is used to create a more progressive attitude of mind with regard to rights and duties, and to rouse the people from an apathy that has been characteristic of China for many thousands of years. All that was good in the past must be represented as disgusting depravity, and the people must wade through blood to rehabilitate themselves in the light of a new order, which rejects everything that is not Communism.

The idea of Courts is an obsession that haunts the head of the Peasants' Association, while his main activity is the seizure of the land and its immediate distribution among the families in the village. His programme is splendid: the village must behave as if it were a single family and there must be no distinctions between rich and poor. If it stopped there, Communism would be an excellent thing.

After the division of the land the former registers are reopened and a search is made for the *lao ts'ai* who so long deprived the people of the land, and made large profits. Naturally the richest are the first to be hunted down. If it happens that one of these unfortunates has not fled because of his love of his land, or because he thinks he has nothing to fear from the new brigands, or because he is old, or for some other reason, he plays the principal part in the inhuman tragedy, very soon making his appearance on the stage.

'Lao t'sai!'

'I inherited my land from my ancestors.'

'During your life you have always had food, clothes, amusements. You have forced your peasants to work on your land and very often you have paid them with beatings.'

'It is not true. I have always paid fair wages and I have never beaten anyone.'

'Your mind is too hard and first of all it must be opened. Come.'

The unhappy man is lead into a room and forced to examine his whole life. He must think, meditate, discover his sins! Not understanding Communist methods, far from declaring himself to be a sinner, he remains convinced of his innocence. He is taken back to the stage.

'To treat you with kindness would be a crime. Listen! Have you any sons?'

'Yes.'

'When they were small and disobeyed you or did something that annoyed you, what did you do?'

'I punished them.'

'Did you beat them?'

'Yes.'

'Did you beat them for the pleasure of beating them or for their good?'

'For their good.'

'Your mind is like that of a child who cannot reason. We have given you time and opportunity to reflect on your sins, but you insist on declaring that you are innocent. We are sorry but . . .'

The poor man is beaten by his own workmen until he bleeds. Covered with blood, exhausted and in great pain, he has to submit to a new sermon.

'We beat you not because we wish you any ill. We are not inhuman and have your interests at heart. Did you not say that, when your sons were small and did not obey you or did things you did not like, you corrected them? If we do not do the same, your mind will never be opened.'

It is the treatment he has received and not the sermons he has heard that makes the victim admit that he has beaten his workmen and has made too much money out of his land. The lesson has had its effect: the mind is open. The Court begins again:

'So you admit having beaten the peasants unjustly?'

'Yes.'

'And having wasted your money while others suffered from hunger?'

'Yes.'

'Do you think you deserve punishment or praise?'

'Punishment.'

And the punishment is immediately dealt out—a fine so enormous that it would ruin a Croesus—20,000, 50,000, 100,000 or more pounds of millet or corn. Everybody knows that he cannot pay such a fine, but Communism does not recognize such a fact. It profits by this opportunity to show ‘its love for the people,’ who bleed.

‘We could take the land you own, your house, all you possess; but we pity you and leave you all, so that you can pay the fine.’

The unfortunate man wants to sell his land, but who would dare to buy it? Yes, the law would allow it, but everyone feels that, even if he had some barrels of silver dollars buried in his courtyard, such a purchase might get him into serious trouble. Then the victim turns to the State, which takes the land and gives him practically nothing. The trick could not be more cunning. By the multiplication of such cases, all land gradually comes into the hands of the State, which has it cultivated, makes enormous profits, or gives it to whom it likes.

Although, in these Courts, the punishment is nearly always the same, it often happens that zealous heads of the Peasants’ Association think of additions of a surprising maliciousness. They consider that the *lao ts’ai* are people accustomed to giving orders, so they will teach such people to obey. They urge them to sell everything to pay the taxes and when they see them in a state of destitution, politely invite them to go to work for their former peasants. Such humiliation would be bitter and painful to anyone, but in China it is abominable. One can imagine the state of mind of a man who falls into the clutches of ‘the holy law of Communism.’ But even this plot has its object.

After a certain time, the ex-*lao ts’ai* is sent for to give an account of how he is getting on. During the questioning the chiefs appear harsh and threatening, so that the victim has the impression that his sins have not been forgotten by the Communists, and this confuses him. The Communists are past-masters in profiting from such a state of mind. Suddenly things change.

‘How do your new masters treat you? What do they sow? What do they eat? What kind of harvest have they had?’

Hardly any man could resist the temptation to save himself from fresh punishment, and, in the hope of making himself popular, he accuses his former peasants, talking of the ill-treatment and the hardships he has had to endure. The chiefs’ faces become threatening.

‘You have suffered these injustices and you have never said anything? What must we do to open your mind? Accuse them at once.’

A People’s Court is held.

'This man has something to say against his master.'

The master has always scrupulously obeyed the orders he received and is far from expecting the tragic fate that awaits him. He is ordered by the head of the Peasants' Association to come on the stage.

'You see that your mind is closing and is becoming like that of your old master.'

The new victim looks round the crowd as if seeking someone to defend him. He bows his head like a child discovered in some fault. Astonished and bewildered for a second, he defends himself desperately.

'But you told me to ill-treat this man.'

Nobody says anything. The instruments of torture are brought.

'Anyone who has suffered ill-treatment must avenge himself.'

And the ex-*lao-ts'ai*, even if his soul shrinks from such savagery, has to inflict the torture.

'The people must punish injustices. The authorities exist only to help and defend the people in carrying out their acts of revenge.' This is the usual slogan which arouses the disgust and hatred of the people themselves, who wish to have nothing to do with such crimes.

The tragedy continues. It is necessary to keep the people's minds in a perpetual state of agitation, which creates among them rifts born of hatred and wickedness. The ex-*lao ts'ai* is rehabilitated at the expense of the ex-worker. After a certain period the situation changes again. And so, by a series of Courts, the people are strangled and left no time to breathe.

What happens between rich and poor often happens between those who could never have been called rich and who have passed their lives in want, and now think of their former misery with longing. A terrible pessimism falls on everyone and they try to adapt themselves to difficulties that they accept as fate. Attempts at rebellion are either abortive because of the active espionage or, if they flare up, are fires of straw to be quenched in blood. I could name many once-flourishing villages that now lie like fields of corn beaten down by hail. Others have been destroyed in an outburst of Communist fury. All the land passes into the hands of the State and the idea of inheritance belongs to a Utopia that has disappeared.

Another activity of the *Nung Min Hui* is the surveillance of anyone who does not work. It must be said that the Chinese is very hard-working and loves his land, so it seems strange that the Communists consider surveillance necessary. It is, however, but another means of seeing that everything passes completely under their control.

The victims are those who, because of their natural goodness, have never done anyone any harm and have always enjoyed the respect, indeed the affection of the village. A Communist once said to me:

'They are a class who, after you, give us the most trouble. Their goodness is so false and cunning that all the populace would have their collective throat cut to save them from the hands of justice. But it must not happen. We alone must rule.'

These words have always remained in my mind as an infamous challenge to all that is good and honest in human nature.

The first to fall into the hands of the tyrants are those who, having reached a certain age, have left the cultivation of their lands to their sons; it is a law of nature from which no one can escape. In addition it is only fair that the sons should do the work under paternal supervision, enjoying, in this way, the fruits of their fathers' labours. In China this has always worked perfectly smoothly, but it is turned topsy-turvy by Communism, under which the well-earned rest of the old man is regarded as an unforgivable crime. I remember two typical instances.

At Lits'un, a hamlet only twenty *li* from Suiych, after an interminable series of Courts, an old man of seventy was condemned to be tied to two mules and dragged round the streets of the village.

He had been head of the village for many years and had been respected and trusted. With the coming of Communism, he had had to give up the position and, like so many others, was reduced to beggary. After the distribution of the land he went back to work, more to comply with the wishes of the new tyrants than from any desire to make money.

'I am old,' he said to his sons. 'All I want is a handful of millet a day.'

The fear that his wicked behaviour might bring misfortunes on his sons made him work too hard, but the warnings of his friends had no effect.

'I must obey,' he would reply.

Once or twice he was brought home in a faint.

Meanwhile the new head of the Peasants' Association was instigated by the Communists to find some charge to bring against him. The first attempt failed because the people rose *en masse*. Faced by such a demonstration of affection, the People's Commissar had to retire and the Communists gave orders that nothing more was to be said for the moment. A month afterwards, the head of the Association, who, perhaps, was not quite a fool and whose mind was probably not 'open'

to the Communist point of view, appeared late one evening and said to the old man:

'It is the chiefs' wish that you should be *chien-t'ao* at all costs. I've wasted the whole of to-day with the *Kung-tso-yuan* trying to find a reason to condemn you. The only one that we have discovered is that you are a Christian, a follower of the foreign devil's religion. Listen. Do me the kindness to run away—and your sons as well. Everybody likes you and will help you.'

The old man smiled: 'I have never done anything that my conscience tells me is wrong. I shall stay.'

The next day there was a Court that lasted for the whole day and ended in the hasty flight of the Commissar. The Courts that followed showed a growing spirit of hatred, but the people's determination defeated the evil purposes of the Communists. Indignation reached such a pitch that people no longer concealed their opinions about the wickedness of the new brigands. Some even began to talk about revolution.

This state of things lasted for about ten days. One morning the people awoke to find the village surrounded by soldiers and the lanes invaded by eight People's Commissars, who threatened with the most terrible penalties anyone who tried to leave his house. The People's Court began about nine o'clock. The old man, bent but dignified, appeared on the stage. He said only one sentence:

'What do you want?'

'You follow,' began the Commissar, 'the religion of the foreign devil.'

'The law,' said the old man's eldest son, 'allows liberty of religion.'

'You shall speak later,' said the Commissar and had him bound. A second Commissar spoke:

'You, old fool, did not want to work and pretended to faint instead of earning your food by the sweat of your brow.'

The old man remained silent.

'You don't want to confess your crime?' asked a third commissar. 'We will make the stones confess it for you.' He turned to the head of the Peasants' Association. 'Bring two mules.'

The old man was stripped and his feet were tied to the two animals.

'Confess your crime,' they said to him again.

The old man did not speak. A blow of the whip and the two mules dragged the poor thin body over the stony ground. The sight enraged the people and the wives of the two elder sons suddenly went mad and threw themselves into a well with their babies in their arms. Some

young men had already seized the Commissar by the throat and were strangling him, but soldiers intervened and put a stop to this sudden outburst of fury and hatred. The mules, left to themselves, dragged the old man out of the village to the foot of the hill. On the way he lost all the skin on his head and arms.

The village was horribly punished. Only about thirty people remained of the entire population and none of them knew what their fate was to be. The chiefs decided that they should disappear as quickly as possible.

The second case was that of an old and sick Christian who lived at Haochuang, a part of the Christian village of Tienchiaching. Owing to his ill-health, he got up late in the morning. The Communists were not slow to describe this as a crime and the usual People's Court was summoned.

'You are ill because you will not work.'

Luckily the old man was being attended by the local doctor.

'Ask him if I am ill or not,' he said.

In order to save appearances and hoping that the doctor would be intimidated by the alarming appearance of the Court and give evidence against his patient, they sent for him. To their surprise and wonder they found themselves confronted by a man who knew his duty when it meant speaking the truth and acting in accordance with the dictates of his conscience.

'Is it true that this man is ill?'

'Yes.'

'And the illness prevents him from working?'

'He cannot do any work at all. You have only to look at him to see he is not well.'

'You speak like that because you are still fond of the rich.'

They were both condemned to pay large fines and in addition, the doctor lost his post and was sent to work as a labourer for a family in the village. The old man had to sell even the clothes of his sons' wives in order to pay the fine. He did not feel any bitterness (a strange thing for a Chinese), even trying to take pleasure in the cruelty of his persecutors.

'They have robbed me of all,' he said with a smile that suddenly made him look young. 'They will rob me even of my body, but they can't rob me of my soul!'

I could cite many similar instances.

And the terrible Peasants' Association continues its abominable and

bloody work. The land, which the Communists pretend to guard and defend from money-lenders, the rich, the enemies of the people, has become the spoil of murderers and tyrants. It is no longer the sweat of thousands and thousands of generations that makes it fertile, but the blood of a people in agony, who, between one sob and another, bite on the sod that cries for vengeance on these infamous criminals.

#### *10th December*

The Communists seemed to have forgotten us. For a second day, not one of them came to see us. The presence of a hundred Christians had made a great impression in the district. Even *La Moresina* was astonished and very proud to see such a crowd in her courtyard. People were talking about it all the time, no doubt increasing the hatred and spitefulness of the Communists. What were the feelings of the judge and the mandarin? And how did they feel about the way we had behaved to them?

#### *11th December*

The Christians from Suiyeh left before dawn. They went away happily and noisily, instead of, as usual, sadly, certain that they would soon see us back again 'in our own house.' All that had happened made us feel quite kindly, even to the Communists. A profound belief in the reality of our hope, quite different from what we had felt on other occasions, raised our spirits and in saying good-bye, we added instinctively:

'We shall see you soon.'

Two women catechists and two other Christians stayed behind to mend our underclothes. They had begun this work the day they arrived and were still very busy, all our rags passing through their hands. It needed great patience to patch the shirts with rags that showed their different origins and colours. I saw them consulting together and turning rags split in every direction round and round. Even *La Moresina* came and gave her valuable advice. The work was only finished during the evening and we arranged for the menders to leave the following morning.

#### *12th December*

The Christians set out before dawn on their journey, with good wishes on both sides and hopes of meeting again soon. The judge's soldiers were quite kind, but I noticed three armed men loafing near our gate.

After dinner at two o'clock *La Moresina*, contrary to her usual habits, came in with a terrified face and trembling a little with fear and a little with shame. The poor woman shut the door, looked round as if to assure herself that we were really alone and then said to me in a mysterious tone:

'Shenfu, outside the gate there are three soldiers who are looking for your Christians. I said that I did not know anything about them, and that perhaps they had already left. The soldiers told me to come and see if they had really gone.'

She wiped her mouth with the palm of her hand, smoothed her hair and, still trembling, went back to her house.

The Communists had left us in peace too long. Once again we must begin the life of alarms and fear. As, for the moment, they could not show their teeth to us, they were working off their rage on the Christians.

Towards evening we found out that the soldiers had been sent by the mandarin to keep an even closer watch on us, while the soldiers on the wall around the prison were laughing and clamouring for our death. The change of scene was most depressing and mysterious. If we only knew where to find that government representative. Perhaps he had left and his curs had slipped off their leashes. Or had he been playing a game with us? I kept thinking of this possibility. I had seen several Communist chiefs, but this one had seemed to me quite different from the others.

But there was something else: the people were saying that we were to be taken away and hanged. These scraps of information made the darkness horrible and indescribably dreary. Were all our hopes to be shattered and were we to be the victims of an unknown and terrible fate?

*13th December*

That day made an indelible impression on my mind. The world may say what it likes. It may laugh, but it can never make me forget the dream that brought me so much joy.

The previous night I had gone to bed, but I had not slept. I had had the impression that my life had already come to an end. A kind of delirium came upon me at midnight and I had said to myself, sweating with agony:

'It is finished, it is finished.'

About three in the morning the crisis passed and I fell into a light

and healing sleep. I do not know how long I slept, but suddenly I felt a touch on my shoulder and heard a voice calling me. I got up. It was still dark and everything was quite still. I thought that I must have been awakened by a movement by Father Monti, who slept beside me, so lay down again and went to sleep. The touch was repeated. I got up once more and heard the voice say quite distinctly:

'Why are you afraid? Do you not know that you will be free in a few days?'

I looked about me. Daylight and an icy blast were coming in through a little window covered with torn strips of paper. I felt an entirely different man, strong and cheerful. What an extraordinary dream!

The day passed quite quietly and I tried to comfort the two Fathers, saying:

'In a few days we shall be free.'

The other prisoners worked frantically, preparing for the move to Shanchuang for which arrangements had been made a few days previously. My companions were terribly depressed, and I was so sorry for them that I was tempted to tell them my dream, but was restrained by a sense of shame. If only it had been in my power to hasten that blessed day!

#### *14th December*

I went out with Father Monti. It made me very unhappy to see him so downhearted. It seemed a crime to keep silent, so I told him about my dream.

'I hope it will prove true,' he said without enthusiasm.

I was surprised and began to wonder if it had been a trick of my imagination. I remembered that I had been a little delirious that night. I had been very unhappy and my dream might have been a reaction. But I did not feel as anxious as usual, and even physically felt very much better. If that dream had had this effect on me it was a pity I had not had it before. And if the result of the delirium had been to make me so light-hearted on this occasion, why had it left me feeling so miserable physically and morally on other occasions? I would go on hoping.

During the afternoon, I was sent for by the head of the chamber of commerce, whom I had not seen for several days. Finding him very depressed, I tried to comfort him and to preach him a little sermon, but he was strangely quiet.

'Why are you so silent?' I asked him. 'Did you not tell me that

Communists must be prepared to make sacrifices and must rise superior to their own natures and their own souls?’

‘I am tired of being ill,’ he answered with a sigh. ‘I bought some neosalvarsan<sup>1</sup> to-day. It is the last cure, and if that does not work. . . .’

While I was giving him an injection, two officers came in. One said to the other:

‘Here is our new doctor. He won’t escape us again!’

I remembered them—they were the two officers from Linchi.

The encounter had no effect on me, so great was my belief in the words of my dream, ‘in a few days.’

*15th December*

The head of the prison warned us that the next day or the day after we should have to move to Shanchuang.

‘But we are all right here,’ replied Father Perottoni, ‘and the Government representative told us that we are free.’

This man, who had heart disease and a green face, and had always avoided us, now smiled and said:

‘It is an order from the mandarin.’

‘But the mandarin told us—’

‘If you don’t understand, you must ask him for an explanation. My job is to make this communication.’ And he went away.

And so we were to leave this place which had seen us despair and hope, endure so many sufferings and know so few joys. It was sad to think that we had to go, for, however unhappy we had been in our hovel, at least we were accustomed to it. I felt as if I were a wounded man prepared to suffer anything rather than fall into the surgeon’s hands, but with this difference; for a wounded body there was nothing but good to be expected from the surgeon, but in our case the surgeon would make our wounds worse.

‘Well, what shall we do?’ I asked to break a silence full of bitter thoughts.

‘We must get ready,’ said Father Perottoni.

And yet those blessed words, ‘you will be free in a few days,’ kept ringing in my ears, and I should still have hoped even when the rope was round my neck or I was about to be thrown into a cauldron to be roasted.

The two Christians from Tienchiaching tried their best to comfort us, their faith tremendous when they saw us so dismayed. In the past,

<sup>1</sup> A compound used in the treatment of syphilis.

they had seen the Fathers powerful and respected, but things had changed, for now 'Father' meant a traitor, a murderer, and 'Christian' meant a traitor's jackal, a murderer's accomplice. Yet they showed their faith in thousands of little acts of kindness, in gentle words that had no reproach in them.

We arranged that one of them should go home to warn the village, while the other stayed behind, to follow us to our new abode and see where our next and perhaps our last prison would be.

We forced ourselves to remain calm and, in order to pass the time, began to make plans.

'We will go to the mandarin. We will write a letter to the central government. We will ask for all three of us to go to the hospital. We will ask as a favour to be allowed to stay here and if so will promise not to escape and to do everything they want. . . .'

*16th December*

The bad news of the previous day kept us in a state of anxiety all the morning. The last batch of prisoners left. No doubt it would be our turn to-morrow. I thought of the future, imagining a cell even worse than the present one, with ruthless jailors who would keep us in solitary confinement, cut off from the outside world until the day when our lives came to an end. The agony was so great that no one spoke all day.

But the words, 'in a few days,' hammered in my head all the time.

And the prophecy of joy and consolation contained in those words was fulfilled. My faith was justified, and our prison was to become no more than a memory. St. Lucy, who had lost her eyes when she suffered martyrdom, had illuminated our darkness with a light that promised liberty.<sup>1</sup>

But I must put down what happened in chronological order.

At four o'clock in the afternoon, Father Perottoni went out to read his breviary. Father Monti was sitting in the courtyard with his head in his hands, while I walked up and down praying—praying for the liberty foreshadowed in the blessed words, 'in a few days.' At half past four, Father Perottoni returned jubilant, his breviary under his arm and a little image in his hands. He was followed by a small man with a black beard and bright eyes, who said:

'There is news from Wuan.'

Questions tumbled out and the small man answered them, gradually

<sup>1</sup> The 13th December, on which Father Suigo had his dream, was St. Lucy's Day. (Translator.)

preparing us for the good news. He gave us the money that the Fathers had sent us, then the letters, and finally a letter written by the supreme political chief, giving us permission to leave for Wuan.

The origin of the document was very touching. A week before, the Communists had had a great meeting at Pangchen and had invited Father Arioso. During the meeting, he was asked to speak and what he said had made a great impression on everyone. After the meeting, Father Arioso had gone to the political chief and asked that we should be transferred to Wuan. This man, although a Communist, remembered that he had received great kindness from the hated European devils; during the Japanese occupation, his wife, his little girl and his possessions had been saved by priests of the Catholic Church. He gave the permit.

Father Arioso despatched it to us immediately by the Christian, who, after four days and a rather adventurous journey, had finally arrived. His meeting with Father Perottoni had been very moving. He knew that we were in the village and had tried to get into touch with us, but had found it impossible. He sat down, in the hope that one of us would come out, and saw Father Perottoni. He went up to him and made the sign of the Cross, but the Father, being busy reciting his office, did not notice. The man thought that this was not the person he was looking for, and went away. He asked a woman about us and, having made certain, retraced his steps and said, 'Shenfu,' making the sign of the Cross—and they recognized each other.

Our joy was very great at thinking that the permit was drafted in such a way that we could set out on foot without notifying either the judge or the mandarin. A messenger started at once to warn the Christians.

*17th December*

At nine I was sent for to see my new quarters at the hospital. How willingly I went! I saw the room which had been prepared for me, the wards with several patients, 'who are expecting you to-morrow,' said the deputy head. I was very polite to everyone. Why not? I should be moving on the morrow, but not to the hospital—to somewhere very far away.

I came back very happy along the paths that I had so often trodden with despair in my heart. Even the view looked different, the light brighter and gayer. At every step my eyes turned to the north-east to try to distinguish, amid the first green of the corn, the road that led

to beloved Suiyeh. I saw once again Monsignor Scarella's tomb and the cemetery of the Mission. Our poor dead: if only I could take them with me to some place where the wickedness of man is unknown.

In the afternoon Father Perottoni and Father Monti went to tell the mandarin of our departure. He found it difficult to believe and still more difficult to let us go! But it was an order from his superior.

*18th December*

The mandarin's secretary came to thank me in the name of all the Communists for the 'invaluable' work I had done among them during the last six months—a dangerous hymn of praise! I answered with the greatest politeness:

'Thank you for the protection you have given us while we have been here. If it had not been for the Communists, I do not know what would have happened to us. I shall never forget your kindness of heart. We are so grateful for what you have done for us that I shall leave the medicines for the benefit of the hospital.'

'Try to touch one of them!' was obviously what the secretary wanted to say.

I was invited to pay a last visit to the hospital, and went to say good-bye to the Christian dispenser, finding there the head of the chamber of commerce as well. I greeted him, thinking to myself that he was no longer a Communist, but a desperate man. He begged me to find him some remedy for his disease and to come and see him. Then, looking at me sadly, he bowed and went away.

The people had heard of my arrival and had learnt from the paper that the hospital was to be opened that day, so they invaded the courtyard. It was an interminable procession of lame men, men with yellow faces, men with tired faces; of women with weary eyes and signs of premature old age; of crying babies, dirty and suffering. They pushed into the square courtyard, wanting to be cured by this medical wizard. As I gazed at them, they seemed to me to represent Communism in all its misery. My compassion for them made me turn away my eyes. Poor people, my work for you was finished for ever.

After dinner, the Christians began to arrive. They wanted to confess to us for the last time and the only absentees were the old who had been left to look after the houses. It was almost dark when the last group of women arrived. The inhabitants of the village, freed from the judge's clutches, came to rejoice with us, having waited till after dark

because it might have been dangerous to come by day. ‘Ching Chiao’s’ father arrived to offer us the loan of his donkey for the first half of our journey. One remarkable fact: our nearest neighbour, the judge, who had spied on us during our imprisonment, and had caused us so much suffering, had disappeared. Where had the saw-fish hidden?

### 19th December

After a most touching farewell from Christians and pagans alike, we left our prison before dawn, accompanied by several Christians and one of the judge’s soldiers. Tasting the joy of freedom, how happily we walked—impatient of every little incident that delayed us, hurrying away from the scene of so many unhappy memories.

Passing through villages where six months before we had been treated with such contempt, we came to the mountains—the summits, the dried beds of streams that had seen our suffering during our first escape. The biting air of the heights made us want to run. At all costs we had to reach Suiyeh that day. What a surprise it would be for the schoolmaster, who had been left in charge of the Mission, and for the Christians who had suffered and hoped with us!

By sunset we were about twenty-five *li* from Suiyeh. A little water and four dried figs, and we took the road again. A great red moon rose, and we walked on in silence. The joy of the morning had passed. Our hearts were pounding, our minds as confused as if we were about to cross some unknown, mysterious threshold. But we were going to our own home and would be among our own people, seeing again the scenes of our former apostolic triumphs.

We arrived. The Communist sentry on the wall of our house challenged us and ordered us to stop:

‘One of you come forward. Woe to anyone else who moves! ’

The soldier who was with us stepped forward. We waited a long time, but finally entered the porch and saw once again the schoolmaster and some Christians, who rushed out crying and shouting with joy. After long months, we were once more within the walls that were our whole world.

### 20th December

The news of our arrival had spread like wildfire and the Mission was crowded with Christians. This enthusiastic and affectionate welcome disconcerted the Communists who were living in our house. At nine o’clock we went to call on the mandarin, finding with him the chief

who had given permission for our return. We asked leave to stay there instead of having to go to Wuan.

'You are too near our enemies,' was the reply. 'It would be better for you to go to Wuan, where Father Arioso is waiting for you. We will see after New Year's Day.'

He said we could stay for Christmas.

Communist soldiers were coming and going all the afternoon.

*21st December*

We wrote to the missionaries at Changte, telling them of our arrival at Suiyeh.

The Mission was invaded by Christians from all the surrounding villages. An old woman came to me and said:

'Shenfu, I have something to give you, something very valuable.'

'What is it?' I asked her.

'Your evening clothes.'

The day after we had been carried off, she had come to the Mission and had seen a Communist with black clothes under his arm. He had put them down on the step of the church, and the woman, without wasting any politeness on him, had gone up and taken them.

'They don't belong to you,' she had told him and, clutching them in her arms, had gone away, paying no attention to protests or threats. She had taken the clothes home with her, dug a hole in her courtyard, wrapped them in straw and buried them. Now she was delighted because she could give them back to me.

## CHAPTER

# I6

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*22nd December 1945*

AFTER dinner I was peacefully mending a sock when a soldier appeared.

'You know me, Shenfu?'

Chinese etiquette demands that one should never say 'no.' It is not polite. I did not commit myself, and he went on:

'I used to see Father Veneroni and another Father with a beard like yours in this very room.'

'How long were you here?'

'I was in General Ma Fu-wu's army and was made prisoner by the Communists at the battle of Tzechow, but I did not wish to be a soldier, still less to become a Communist.'

I did not feel quite sure that he was telling the truth.

'How many years is it since you left home?'

'Nine years.'

He proceeded to tell me a long story about his vicissitudes. He had even tried to escape, but the Communists had recaptured him and, to his great surprise, had neither beaten nor ill-treated him. He begged me to intercede with the chiefs for permission to go home. This simplicity removed my suspicions that he was not what he pretended to be.

'How many prisoners are there?'

'A large number. All those with stars like mine in their caps are prisoners.'

There were certainly a great many of them wandering round and round the courtyard like dogs on leashes. They were not tied up, but a hundred eyes watched them and followed their every movement.

The Communists have a special technique for dealing with prisoners. When they capture a town, the first thing they do is to round up all the soldiers and dig out those who, for fear of falling into their hands, have thrown away their arms and camouflaged themselves in shabby,

clothes stolen from civilians. The method the Communists adopt to discover these men is very curious. They go into every house and shake hands with all the men, those whose hands are soft being immediately arrested.

'Men who work,' the Communists say, 'have rough, calloused hands; men with soft hands are thieves, businessmen and students; those who have rough but not calloused hands are soldiers.'

Obviously under this system many innocent men are seized and they find it impossible to get away. Badly wounded prisoners are eliminated at once; the lightly wounded are arrested and have their wounds attended to. The Communists need men. The prisoners represent a very valuable source of supply and, when cleverly 're-educated,' can eventually be drafted into the army. I have seen and studied this work of 're-education.' Six months before, when Suiyeh fell, that same courtyard was crammed with prisoners, exhausted and miserable, staring about them in terror. I noticed that no Communist soldier spoke unkindly to them, still less threatened them. I was astonished at another thing: the Reds allowed them to be the first to get their water and draw their rations. After this exhibition of humanity, the prisoners were divided into parties and sent by different roads to safe places in the western mountains.

When they reached their destinations, the work of 'persuasion' began.

'You must be happy to find yourselves among us. We know you fought against us because you did not understand us.'

'Words are clay, but actions are golden,' is a proverb the Communists certainly understand, and when it is desirable they act on it.

'We see that you have suffered from hunger while you were fighting for our enemies, and that you are worn out by the last battle, so eat and rest.'

Such behaviour was unheard of in a country where a prisoner who is not killed is held for ransom.

'Do you need clothes? We will give you some.'

The Communists never use the word 'prisoner.' Such men must be given the sensation of enjoying a certain amount of comfort and freedom. A large number of prisoners accept the situation and wait to see what will happen next, meanwhile enjoying the generosity of the Communists. Some go over body and soul to their new masters, showing the same enthusiasm with which they left home to become soldiers. Others watch for a good opportunity to escape. A fourth

group—and the most to be pitied—is composed of young men who were forced to become soldiers against their will, or who were seized because they were believed to be soldiers. Desiring only to go back to their homes and their land, they seek to soften the hearts of the Communists, not realizing that they are merely tightening their own chains. Their lamentations get on the nerves of the Communists until finally they liquidate ‘this useless and cowardly civilian rabble.’

After the first period, during which the Communists show themselves to be kind and good-natured in the hope of softening the prisoners’ minds, there follows a period of instruction in Communist principles. It is like a great wave breaking with incredible violence, the individual finding himself carried away into a new world. It is not a subtle method of penetration that leaves time for reflection; it is an insistent hammering intended to break down resistance at any cost. The prisoner either surrenders or is overwhelmed by the avalanche.

Whatever hour of the day I was called to visit a patient, I would see one of these schools. Seated under the shade of trees when it was hot, or on the deserted threshing-floors in the sunshine when it was cold, the pupils listened patiently hour after hour. The only relief was when they were eating or singing.

‘What do you think of the Communists? Perhaps they have treated you badly?’

I often heard this question and the prisoners answered in chorus: ‘You have treated us well.’

Fine words, but they do not satisfy the master and still less those who employ him. Somebody, overcome by sudden excitement and still not understanding the meaning smile of the demagogue, dares to ask:

‘And when will you let us go home?’

Those are the moments when the Communists’ patience is tried to its uttermost. They have fed these creatures, treated them well, taught them to repeat the vague and stale compliment, ‘You have treated us well,’ and, instead of showing enthusiasm for the cause, all they say is: ‘And when will you let us go home?’

The patient master begins again from the beginning and tries to make them grasp that Communism expects to be paid and in what coin they must pay. In most of their minds there is a vivid and crushing realization of the reason for this kind treatment and, in order not to make their debt seem greater, they do not show undue enthusiasm, nor do they wax eloquent in praising Communist kindness. Then

their real imprisonment begins, though they are not loaded with chains.

'We do not wish to keep anyone here by force. Those who stay must be cheerful.'

The real meaning of this wearisome refrain is very obvious and everyone understands it, though they give no sign.

'We do not wish to keep you here by force. At the same time, we will not let anyone go home.'

The only ones who are free from this dilemma are those who spontaneously declare that they are ready and willing to do what the chiefs wish. The others are subjected to more detailed instruction, with the object of making them understand quite clearly that Communism does not keep anyone by force and that all must remain of their own free will. The blows fall with increasing regularity, the barriers of resistance crumble and the number of the stubborn diminishes. For those who insist on their right to think for themselves, Communism reserves the 'confession,' which I have already described. It is the last attempt and when that has failed, there is the final choice—Communism or death. Confronted with this alternative, and without hope, the last group gives in and becomes a component part, like all the others, of that world of happiness promised but never achieved by the tyrants.

Their days are passed under the control and criticisms of masters far severer than the first. The most exemplary obedience, complete submission to any order, an appearance of cheerfulness whatever they may be suffering, all this will create a certain sympathy between officers and men—sympathy that does not wipe out the knowledge that they are to be made use of until the day death frees them from the Communist yoke.

Many of these prisoners lose all self-control and become mere beasts craving for blood. Then Communism will forget the past and lavish all its kindness on them. Many risk death in a second attempt to escape. It is strange, but those who escape once and are recaptured are not punished—just as we were not. The worst that will happen to them is to hear the terrible reproof:

'Who is not with us is not worthy to live'—a sentence that may be translated: 'Who is retaken after a second attempt to escape will pay for his folly with his life.'

And the Communists proclaim: 'We are the liberators!'



The Christian who had brought the permit allowing us to come to Suiyeh, left for Wuan. The servant, with a letter for Father Arioso, went with him. In this letter we said:

'The last Communist outpost is a few miles from Suiyeh. If we wanted to do so, we could easily reach the Nationalist zone. We do not know, however, what the effect of our flight would be on the priests at Wuan. We therefore want advice as to whether we should carry out our plan or not. We shall not attempt to escape until after the return of the servant.'

*23rd December*

We received a reply to our letter to the missionaries at Changte: 'There are two Americans here who want to do a tour of the Communist zone, and beg you to intervene with the authorities for a permit. I asked them to interest themselves in your liberation, and they have replied that they cannot do anything.'

*24th-25th December*

Helped by the Christians we began to prepare for Christmas. With some strips of cloth, some paper flowers and some fir branches, we succeeded in making the church look quite nice. At midnight, notwithstanding the presence of the Communists, who could not forgive such an unusual gathering of people, we sang Mass.

There was a rumour that on New Year's Day the Nationalists would arrive and drive out the Communists. The Communists' reply was that on the same day they themselves would attack Changte.

*26th December*

In the morning there came to see me a man whose face did not inspire me with confidence. I was talking to a group of Christians and, thinking that he was one of the usual curious soldiers, I paid no attention to him and went on chatting. At a certain moment, offended at my taking no notice of him, he interrupted me and, having solemnly presented his credentials, asked sternly how many we were, what we were doing, and many other questions.

He apparently did not wish to lose face, so became very insulting. Father Perottoni appeared and the questioning became more brusque. We answered—no longer with the timidity of prisoners, but with the confidence of free men. This man with his lowering face sprang to his feet.

'The people don't want you. You cannot stay here. We will look after the people. We don't need your collaboration. Your schools are ours. We don't know what to do with your religion.'

Father Perottoni tried to confute all this, but the Communist shouted: 'That's enough! There are orders for your departure, and you must leave at once.'

And he went away.

After dinner the servant arrived with a letter from Father Arioso which said:

'You must not try to escape. The consequences would be disastrous to us.'

We accepted his decision uncomplainingly and arranged to leave next day for Wuan.

*27th December*

For the second time we left the Mission, and for the second time we had to witness the dismay of the Christians, of whom fortunately there were very few, as it was still very early. The schoolmaster went with us as far as the outskirts of the town. When it came to saying goodbye he could not speak. His emotion deprived him of the power to move and he stood watching us until we disappeared among the first hills.

We stopped at Tsaitsun, which had once promised to be a Christian centre and had now become a field of weeds. It went to our hearts because we had done so much work there and the Communists were busy destroying what little faith remained. At the entrance to the village we were stopped by a boy.

'What are you doing here? Stop. Show your permit. . . .'

And this boy had been baptized.

At midday we arrived at Kuangtai, a great mining centre. The streets were blocked with crowds going to see a rich industrialist condemned to walk through the town wearing on his head the *kao mao tse*, an enormous funnel-shaped paper hat. It was practically impossible to push our way along and we waited to see the man pass. In times of peace such a punishment caused the people the greatest amusement, but now they looked on silently.

Shouts of 'Death to the enemy of the people!' announced the approach of the procession and the unfortunate prisoner advanced, his face dirty and frightened after the beating he had received. He staggered along and in a weary voice recited the crimes he was supposed to have committed. He was followed by his wife and sons who

were forced to shout: 'My husband is a traitor.' 'Our father is a murderer. Death to our father!' Poor fellow, trusting to his honesty, he had not fled when the Communists occupied the town and now he is paying the price.

In the evening we reached Pangchen, another large town, surrounded by a wall and hemmed in by a circle of mounds of rubbish, ashes and fragments of amphorae and vases of every kind and size. There is a very large and active pottery industry. We found a lodging with a good Chinese priest.

*28th December*

Although very tired, we started again, trying, at all costs, to reach Wuan that day. After twenty-five *li* Father Perottoni and Father Monti stopped and waited for a lift in a cart. I continued on foot, certain that my companions would rejoin me.

I reached a curious and very attractive plain. On the left, a chain of barren hills rose precipitously, almost reaching the nearby and historic Great Wall of China, built by the Emperor Ch'in-shih-huang-ti. The emperors had mined a great deal of silver in those hills. To the right, a quantity of pit-heads rose here and there among the corn. I passed the dry and stony bed of a stream and followed the road. I already saw the 'Hill of Iron' rising in the middle of the plain—a most curious phenomenon. Bare and distorted like the skull of a dead man, it consists of different-coloured geological strata. Some years ago, out of curiosity, a Japanese engineer carried out a survey and discovered a very rich deposit yielding more than eighty per cent. of pure iron. Immediately after this discovery, a branch railway-line brought life to this place, formerly sacred to the spirits of the mountains. It would have become a most important industrial centre, but the destructive fury of the Communists had reduced it to its ancient silence. Ruined houses, machinery, upturned coaches littered the yellowish ground, showing how great had been the longing for destruction. The Communists, with their ignorance of mechanical appliances and afraid that sooner or later all this might fall into the enemy's hands, had preferred to demolish everything. I looked sadly at this scene of devastation.

About sunset I arrived, tired but happy, under the dismantled walls of Wuan and soon afterwards was in Father Arioso's embrace. In the late evening, my two companions arrived, and at last we were in our new abode.

*29th December*

The fear that the two officers from Linchi would come to search for me suggested to my mind that I ought to take precautions. As we had been sent here because we were ill, it seemed advisable to profit by this and to ask permission for me to go to Shunte. Once there I would, if possible, escape to Peking. Father Arioso thought that I should not go, but the conviction that those two officers would succeed in tracing me made me insist.

*30th December*

At Wuan, as at Linhsien and Suiyeh, the Mission was invaded all day long by soldiers who wandered about, wanting to see and to know. It was a misery. However, no one dared to lift a hand against the church because on the entrance door there was a large notice that protected it. The schools, however, had been seized. There was still the Santa Infanzia with ninety small girls. The elder ones had been sent for safety to Christian families, but this had created many difficulties. In a short time, the hurricane would burst. Already unwelcome visitors went into the buildings during the night, waking the little girls with shouts of:

'What are you doing here? Your friends outside are playing, laughing, singing, while the European devils keep you in prison.'

And trouble ensued. Alas! Communism was triumphing. The Church would lie prostrate in its own blood.

*31st December*

The last day of the year. It was God's will that this year should die in misery, suffering and anxiety. I did not bid it farewell with joy, but I shall never be able to forget it; my life will be bound to it like the tendril of a vine to a dead stump. How many times, sitting under the great tree within sight of the cemetery of Tienchiaching had I said to myself:

'How long will this life last?'

If someone had told me, 'You will see the end of the year,' it would have been a mortal blow. How blessed is the ignorance of the future! And even if I had known, what practical result would it have had on me? The problems of the future serve only to exacerbate man's overweening pride. These and other thoughts struck my soul with the force of a reproach. I knew, but I did not act in conformity with what I knew. How I should act was clear, but how many times had I refused

to follow divine guidance because it did not conform to my own desires? We are made like that; we worry ourselves about the things that threaten us, deplore what is past, and believe that we can find in this the reason for our existence.

*1st January*

That morning the mandarin's secretary came to wish us a happy New Year. Father Arioso took the opportunity to ask for a permit for me to go to Shunte.

'Come to-morrow,' he answered, 'and I will give it to you.'

All day long, curious people crowded into the Mission. Father Arioso was very busy and in the evening was worn out. What patience was needed!

*2nd January*

At nine o'clock we went to get the permit. The Communists were so kind that I could not believe it.

'Up to the present,' said Father Arioso, 'nothing has happened, and the authorities have always been most respectful to me.'

This surprised me very much and I hoped that they would continue to wear their halo of goodness for a long time.

*3rd January*

Accompanied by the schoolmaster attached to the Mission, I set out for Shunte. We walked through snow all day and in the evening arrived, very tired and numb with cold, at Peichang, where I was welcomed by a Polish priest who lived there.

*4th January*

Before midday I reached the Hankow-Peking railway, reduced to a terrible state by the Communists. There were no rails or sleepers, enormous holes had been dug in the embankments, and the bridges, of which there had been a great many on that part of the track, no longer existed, so communications were a very serious problem.

At sunset I reached my destination. Here the Communists had done no damage and it did not seem like a Communist zone. I visited the hospital, the orphanage and the charitable institutions. All were working as usual and in complete order.

'The Communists are our friends,' said jokingly the Father who accompanied me.

'But you are Poles,' I answered, laughing too. 'Don't let yourselves be surprised by infiltration.'

*7th January*

Father Skovera managed to get me a permit from the Communist police, but only after a declaration that I was seriously ill and that I had to go to a hospital in Peking for treatment. There was most cheering news in the papers, if it was not a Communist trick. Everybody said that the Communists would be leaving in a few days.

*8th January*

The Communists came to look for me. I arranged for them to be told that I had left the previous evening for Peking, and that it was not known when I should return.

This decided me to leave as soon as possible, so as to avoid any trouble for the missionaries. I decided to take advantage of the Mission cart, which was going to Kaoyi the next day to fetch some goods for the Communists.

*9th January*

We left at two o'clock in the morning. The good Father Procurator made me accept a wadded quilt to protect me from the cold. A male nurse from the Mission, his family and two other men travelled with me. They were all leaving because they had been attacked by the Communists. The cold was intense and the three men and I got out of the cart and walked until it was light. As I was a foreigner I did not dare to show myself in public, so got back into the cart and hid under the quilt. We travelled till five o'clock in the evening.

Suddenly there was a rumour that we could not go any further. The Communists were fighting the Japanese under the command of the Nationalists. Some groups of people who had been turned back confirmed the news. We tried to find shelter in a Chinese hotel.

About midnight, a sudden burst of firing alarmed everybody. I went out, followed by my fellow travellers. Amid the cries of terrified people, and creeping along the frozen ground, we managed to reach the great trench beside the railway. We flung ourselves into it and hurried northwards—that is to say, towards the fighting—thinking it would be better to be prisoners in the hands of the Nationalists than to be shot by the Communists. When we had gone a short way, the male nurse's baby, who was terrified, began to cry. This aroused the

suspicions of the Communists in the neighbourhood. A burst of machine-gun fire passed over our heads and immobilized us in the ditch.

'Don't fire!' we shouted. 'We are civilians!'

Shortly afterwards, four soldiers jumped into the ditch, which put an end to our hope of reaching the Nationalists. It was three o'clock in the morning.

*10th January*

Profiting by a lift in a cart going to Shunte, we started on our return journey. After five o'clock, the cold became so intense that I had to get out of the cart, and, taking a pair of socks and some under-clothes from my bundle, I set light to them. Someone went into the fields and returned with some bundles of straw.

We reached the Mission in the evening.

*19th January*

There was most sensational news in the paper: 'The Communists have surrendered unconditionally to the Nationalist government,' and, on the second page, 'Joy over the peace.' So the war was at an end. The Communists were to give up their arms and the troops would be incorporated in the regular army. There were to be three Communist representatives in the government. To-morrow, or the day after, the Nationalist troops were to arrive. Was it true?

*20th January*

Notwithstanding the previous day's news, people from the north said that the Communist and Nationalist troops were still fighting. Even the paper no longer mentioned peace, resuming its usual abuse of the central government. It was not the first time the papers had indulged in such jokes.

*21st January*

I received with the greatest joy the news that Father Perottoni and Father Monti had left Wuan and started for Changte. I re-read the letter from Father Forestan, brought by two seminarists:

'If you have not yet left for Peking, could you not reach it from this part of the country? Father Arioso left two days ago for the city of the Bishop (Weihui); yesterday Father Perottoni and Father Monti left for the town of Father Pessina (Changte). If you want to do this, return at once.'

Perhaps Father Perottoni and Father Monti had already succeeded in escaping from this torturing world of Communism. 'At this very moment,' I thought, 'their courage may have been crowned with liberty! May God help them!'

How many times during the long months of imprisonment had I tried their patience with my useless but incessant plans for escape. I did not realize then that it was an obstinate faith in my own opinion and that the outcome would be very doubtful, for I believed that it was only a question of choosing the right moment. If their patience had been rewarded, how happy I should be.

The invitation was for me also. I would not stop to argue about it, but would prepare to follow their example. I felt as if I were on the banks of a river and saw my two brethren on the other side stretching out their hands and offering me freedom.

To-morrow night I would make the attempt.

*23rd January*

At four o'clock in the morning, I started with two Christians. So as not to arouse suspicion, I did not wear spectacles and had shaved off my beard with a piece of glass. I put my bundle on my shoulder and pretended to be a peasant (my clothes were quite shabby enough). We took the broad road beside the old railway and pushed on at a good pace. There were a good many people about, but they were attending to their own affairs. In that brilliant moonlight, nobody would begin a conversation unless he was a spy, which was fortunate for me. Even an enquiry about the way might be dangerous.

About midday, we left the main road and took to the paths that led to the mountains. The country was dreary and sandy; in some places the sand stretched for two miles and was so deep that it made walking very tiring. Here and there some dry bushes broke the monotony of the waste of sand. We were in the dry bed of the Sha River.

About four we climbed the first hills, trying to avoid the villages. The cruel cold protected us from curious people. In the evening we arrived safely at the Mission at Peichang. We had covered half the road and to-morrow, please God, we should be at Wuan.

*24th January*

Accompanied by one of the two young Christians of the day before, I started again. The cold was bitter, the sky cloudy, and we did not meet a living soul on the road. About midday we reached the first

Christian district of the Vicariate of Weihui. I said good-bye to the seminarist and, accompanied by two Christians, set off towards Tunglüeh.

By sunset we were under the walls of Wuan. To avoid creating curiosity or suspicion, I tied a handkerchief over my head in the Communist style and, taking off my spectacles again, entered the city. It was almost dark and so it was easy to avoid meeting people. I was very glad to reach the Mission.

*25th January*

I succeeded in getting a written permit to go to Suiyeh 'to celebrate the peace.' On the morrow I was to set off on my last dangerous adventure. With the permit I should go not to Suiyeh, but to Changte, where the Communists had not yet arrived. If all went according to plan, in two days I should have my heart's desire.

*26th January*

I could not get away because, owing to the very strict guard being kept, nobody dared to go with me. Even permits to leave the town had been suspended. After dinner I sent for the Christian who had come to Putihsiaochuang to bring us the news of our liberation, and asked him to go with me:

'I'm ready,' he said. 'When do you want to start?'

'To-morrow.'

'Good.'

'But—the permit?'

'Oh, Father, I've lots of them!'

*27th January*

By five o'clock in the morning, we were on the road. We left the Mission with the greatest caution, when everyone was asleep. We crossed the river and walked south as fast as we could. The sun was just rising when suddenly a bank of fog covered the sky and a bitter wind came from the mountains to the west. The fog was a blessing, for it hid us from curious eyes.

We walked silently, partly to save our strength and partly for fear of being heard. We passed several villages, among them the one that had the honour of sheltering three eminent personages—Mao Tse-tung, Chu Teh and Chou En-lai. We crossed another river, found a

very narrow deserted road, climbed up and down a little hill, then were in sight of Pangchen, where we were to stop.

It was market-day and we met a lot of people on the road. We entered the town and made our way through crowded streets to the Mission. It was beginning to snow, which was a fresh difficulty, but fortunately at nine o'clock it stopped, so to-morrow we could go on.

*28th January*

The snow was not deep enough to hide the road, and the wheel-tracks were an excellent guide. There were more than fifty kilometres before us, but that did not matter if, at the end of them, I could say, 'I am free!' We walked fast and my legs were very painful, but I pushed on. We entered a gorge in the barren hills. The ground was very rough and the road disappeared. Down below was a village and possibly a road to the south-east. We climbed down very cautiously, but before we reached the village, we found ourselves on the main road.

'This is it,' said my guide.

We crossed the road, avoided the village and reached the plain. Even the snow was a help. There was not a human being in the fields, only now and then the bark of a stray dog. About two o'clock, we were almost in sight of the Chang River. Here we had some trouble, owing to the very close watch being kept. We got on to some sand and, in a few steps, were on the river bank.

'We must take a boat,' my guide told me. 'Get into the bow and do not turn your head towards the stern. I will do what is necessary.'

I took off my spectacles and covered my head with a piece of cloth.

I am not Chinese and, though I had been in China so many years, I still did not understand all the intrigues of that mysterious people, so I followed my guide blindly. He led the way to a public ferry. With complete self-possession, he went up to some soldiers and asked:

'How far is to Hunghotun?'

'Twenty-five *li*,' they answered, and began to chatter.

The boat arrived and we embarked. We reached the opposite shore—and another danger was over.

After a few steps, we found a pagoda and took refuge there out of consideration for our stomachs and our legs. Refreshed, we took the road again, climbed a rough frozen embankment and found that we had reached the old railway to the mines of Kuangtai.

We had walked half a *li* when we were stopped by three soldiers

who covered us with their rifles and ordered us to put up our hands. They advanced and stripped me without any apology—they were Communists. After having seized my bundle, they asked who I was, where I was going, what I was doing, etc.

I became paralysed with the cold. Pain, a general sensation of tingling and shivering prevented me from moving. How miserable to die within a few steps of freedom!

With a supreme effort, which perhaps cost me more than life itself, I renewed my act of faith in God and commended myself to Him.

'Have you a passport?' one of the soldiers asked me.

'Yes.' I pointed to it.

He snatched it up and began to read it upside down.

'The other way up,' I said.

His friend turned it round and perhaps recognized the three first characters:

'Ah, you are a priest of the Catholic Church?'

'Yes.'

'I am a friend of your Church.'

He told me that he had known a certain priest, some 'women priests' and a large chapel.

The mind inevitably reflects the state of the body. I no longer felt cold or tired. I seemed to be supported, almost enclosed in an enormous orthopædic apparatus that pressed on my whole person. My mind was confused; I could not feel or see or understand anything.

'Don't you see the Father is cold?' said my guide. 'Let him put on his clothes.'

'Certainly,' said the soldier, then turned to the others: 'Give him his clothes and help him, for he is our friend.'

They took off the bits of my clothing they had already divided and put on their own backs, and re-dressed me.

My arms had become like pieces of wood and it was very difficult to get them back to their normal position. I seemed to be in some horrible nightmare. The blood rushed to my head. I realized that I was in a very dangerous state and that the crisis might prove fatal, so, following some instinct that I could not explain, I began to breathe deeply through my nose.

'Where are you going?' asked the Communist.

'To Hunghotun,' replied the Christian.

'Very well. Go on.'

My will had already made me take some steps, but my body refused

to obey. My feet seemed nailed to the earth, and, instead of walking, I wanted to lie down.

'The Father is very tired,' my guide said to the Communists, and he took me by the arm.

Helping myself along with my stick, I succeeded in freeing myself from the drowsiness that oppressed me. I took some steps, then felt an internal upheaval as if my whole being wanted to free itself. A lump in my throat was choking me. I was violently sick and broke out into a sweat. This seemed to cure me, but I was desperately weak. My God, can I hope not to feel weak any more?

My heart beat violently, my veins felt as if they would burst. It was torturing, but in spite of everything I went on. To-day, alive or dead, I must reach Changte.

As if by magic, the clouds dispersed and a splendid warm sun appeared. We passed Fanglüchchen, meeting several soldiers, but no one paid any attention to us. We approached Hunghotun, the last Communist outpost. Another five or six *li* and we should be out of danger, but those last *li* seemed interminable.

'Hold in your hand the crown of the rosary and pray to the holy souls in purgatory,' the Christian said to me.

I bent my head so as to be able to concentrate my thoughts and recited the rosary with great fervour and devotion, recommending my soul and body to my parents.

We were on the hill above Hunghotun, the moment of the greatest danger and so of our greatest fear. I did not dare to raise my head, terrified that I too would turn into a pillar of salt if I let even a passing glance light on the last and hated centre of Communism. We did not hear or see a living soul. Step by step. . . . If only I had wings just for five minutes. . . . The village receded. It had been in front of us, now it was lost among trees.

'Don't speak to me until we are out of danger,' my guide had said to me a little time previously.

Suddenly he stopped, looked at me, then turning to the right, said: 'Look!'

The railway. We were safe!

'Communism, may you be cursed for ever!' I cried, then fell full-length in the mud of the road.

This was the depth to which Communism had reduced me. This was the depth to which Communism reduces poor humanity.

I wanted to stay where I was. I felt so weak that I do not know how

I was able to go on. We passed the first Nationalist outpost and the airport and reached Changte railway-station. Those smoke-stacks, the whistle of the train, the happiness on people's faces. . . . I seemed to have risen from the dead. . . . We were in a civilized country and the joy of having recovered my freedom, of seeing my brethren in a few minutes, made me forget the state I was in. I did not notice that people were laughing at me. Let them laugh. I would laugh with them, and pray my God to save them from the horrors of Communism.

At half past three, completely worn out, my heart overflowing with gratitude to God, I embraced my dear brethren, Father Perottoni and Father Monti, with whom I had been through so much.

It was right that I should feel joy, but my joy was not, and never can be, complete while I see that people, with their splendid natural gifts and their readiness to embrace Christianity, made the victims of that colossal and monstrous deception—Marxism—which clamps on poor humanity the most unbearable and inhuman tyranny.

Poor people! May you soon achieve your true freedom in the light of the Gospel. If in any way my imprisonment could contribute to this, I bless my sufferings.

## EPILOGUE

**I**N September Japan had fallen, but the Nationalist armies had been far away. The Japanese evacuated the towns and fortifications and retired to the great railway centres, awaiting repatriation after seven years of useless war. Would it not have been better to allow them to hold their positions until the arrival of Chiang Kai-shek's troops? If this had been done, China would never have fallen victim to Bolshevism. It was a mystery. The only people who succeeded in saving something were the Chinese troops who had served with the Japanese, more especially the brigands, who, truth to tell, showed unexpected determination and heroism.

At last, after a period of waiting, the Nationalists made their long-delayed appearance and there was general hope of immediate action to wipe out Communism for ever. But days and months passed and nothing was done. Despair and suspicion spread among the people, and the number of refugees under the walls of the towns and along the railways increased bewilderingly. The misery of this homeless multitude, who, fleeing from the Communists, had abandoned their houses and sought refuge in holes in the ground or in little straw huts, was a continual reproach to the lazy carelessness of the Nationalists.

When the first Americans appeared, a wave of joy swept over the crowd of refugees. It was but a passing and deceptive ray of sunshine. The Americans did not take any interest in the war; they had come only to look for the bodies of their pilots who had fallen in the struggle against the Japanese. The people had to go back to their holes in the ground and to their misery.

Desperation aroused a flame of indignation and courage. The men united and, with a supreme effort, managed to scrape together enough money to buy arms and ammunition. Spurred on by a resolution that overcame every obstacle, they returned to their villages determined to conquer or to die. No one can tell of the heroism of those handfuls of starving men before whom the Communists had to retreat; and they saw their homes again. There could have been no greater reproach to the soldiers safely ensconced in the towns. It is sad to have to say so, but it is the truth.

The Nationalists resented the example that had been set them, and decided to find ways of counteracting its effect on public opinion.

With the excuse of co-ordinating, of helping and controlling the action of the people, they requisitioned all arms and in a very short time the villagers once again found themselves facing the Communist menace. This happened more than once and always with the same result.

When I succeeded in freeing myself from the clutches of the Communists, my joy at recovering my liberty was somewhat damped by the fact that many of the workers for U.N.R.R.A. in Changte were full of enthusiasm for the way in which the Reds had organized the country.

'We've seen it,' they said to me.

One day I lost my patience with them.

'Outside the walls of this town there are more than a hundred thousand refugees, and their numbers increase every day. Ask them why they have left their villages. When you enter a Communist village to bring help, pretend to leave after the distribution of the parcels, and go back to the village a quarter of an hour later. Then you will see what is happening.'

I felt that they regarded my words as a challenge. There were four or five of us missionaries and we all felt choking with hatred against Communism.

Fifteen days later the representatives of U.N.R.R.A. entered a Red zone and handed the parcels to the people who were waiting in cheering queues. The distribution had hardly finished when they got into their car and left the village. Shortly afterwards they returned on some excuse and found the people still lined up, but silent and miserable, *freely* presenting to the Communist authorities the parcels they had received. The affair did not end very pleasantly for the four zealous U.N.R.R.A. officials. When they got back to the frontier they were stopped, their motor was seized and they were imprisoned because 'they had failed to observe the agreement.' They were to give the parcels to the people and go away 'without looking over their shoulders.' It was very difficult to obtain their release—the Communists do not like jokes. When I saw the officials again it was not necessary to ask them any questions.

Another thing that the people found quite incomprehensible was the conduct of the *Ho Tso Hui*<sup>1</sup>. America had intervened to try to settle the very delicate questions between the governments of Mao Tse-tung and Chiang Kai-shek. The Communists demanded complete control over the eastern provinces, which, they said, had been won by

<sup>1</sup> A Commission composed of three members: an American, a representative of the Kuomintang and a representative of the Communist Party.

the lives and sacrifices of their soldiers. Chiang Kai-shek answered very reasonably that his was the recognized government of China and that he would not allow the country to be divided. A meeting was held at Chungking. The discussions and the parleys were endless and naturally reached no agreement. In January 1946 the Communist papers carried banner headlines announcing that agreement had been reached between the two leaders; that Chiang Kai-shek had welcomed Communist representatives in his government and recognized the Red Army. Arms were to be surrendered and a peaceful reconstruction of the country was to be undertaken. But the arms were not surrendered and a few days later the Communists began a general attack on a long and ill-defined front.

Talks started again and, while the Nationalists lulled themselves with the hope of certain victory, leading quiet and pleasant lives in the towns, the troops of Mao Tse-tung occupied the villages and the countryside. The Nationalists, despite their excellent equipment, never knew how to profit by the Communist reverses, never pursued their defeated enemies and forced them to surrender.

The people, seeing the absolute incompetence of the Nationalists and the progressive deterioration of the situation, fled south of the Yellow River. Almost the whole of the northern part of Honan came under the control of the troops of General Liu Pei-cheng. The good fortune of this previously despised Nationalist general was due, in the first place, to his undoubted military ability and also to a run of good luck, which made him a great Communist hero.

When the *Ho Tso Hui* came into existence it sat in the most important towns at a short distance from the Communist zone. Among its specific activities was the settling of questions among the three parties. From the very beginning, one saw the terrible weakness that seriously vitiated its impartiality. When some dispute arose between the Communists and the Nationalists—and the Nationalists included the brigands and the local population, who had done far more fighting than the soldiers—about the possession of a village, the *Ho Tso Hui* would appear on the scene and settle the matter in favour of the Communists, thus arousing the scorn and hatred of the villagers.

I remember one example. The Communists had surrounded the village of Chaiku near Changte, but, despite the forces they employed, had failed to capture it. In the course of the fighting, the defenders (that is to say, the villagers) found in their ranks two Red spies and executed them on the spot. The case was referred to the *Ho Tso Hui*,

which intervened immediately. The Communist member defended his party with such violence that the American took his part and decided to hand the village over to the Communists. The fury of the people was indescribable. The motor belonging to the Commission was burnt, and in front of everybody a woman took off a sock and flung it with curses at the Communist. Anyone who knows China will understand that this was the greatest and foulest insult she could offer him. The affair was settled by the people themselves, who drove the Communists back to the north of the river.

Another misfortune was that this Commission had its headquarters in the town held by the Nationalists. This enabled the Communists to practise quite unimpeded their policy of infiltration and spying. I believe this was one of the chief causes of the final disaster. There was not a corner of the town, not a military secret that the Communists did not know; every day information about the military and political situation was sent to Mao Tse-tung's generals.

One last observation. The Communist representative on the Commission far outshone his colleagues in kindness and affability.

Our Christians, scattered in every part of Suiyeh, were now under the control of the Communists, and it was impossible to get into touch with them from Changte without special permission. We were received with a smile so friendly that it was almost childlike, and the Communist's behaviour was impeccable. He was more than ready to talk; his praises of the Catholic Church were almost extravagant. I had only just regained my liberty, and if I had wanted to do so, I could have proved to him how wide was the gap between his deeds and his words. During the interview he gave us a permit that was valid for ten days, saying that he was most happy to be useful to us and encouraging us to go and see him again whenever we wanted anything. He continued to treat us well, while his fellows were considering crucifying us.

This was the state of affairs at the beginning of 1946. We all felt as if we were walking among the yellowing and rustling leaves of a terrible autumn. No one could stop the gigantic machine from rushing towards a final catastrophe. One saw clearly that the Communist victory would not be a victory of principles ridiculous and incomprehensible to the good Chinese people, but a military victory. Nothing else. Communism in China is a temporary lichen that has spread over a rock, but its roots do not penetrate the stone, and it will die with the first ray of sunshine.

THE END





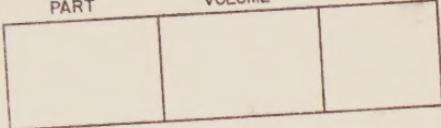
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